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Westview: Vol. 30, Iss. 1 (Fall/Winter 2013)

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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

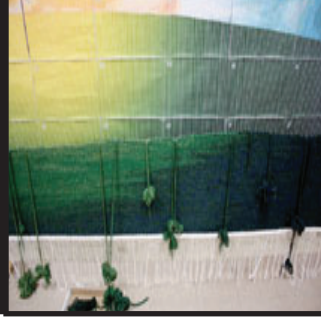
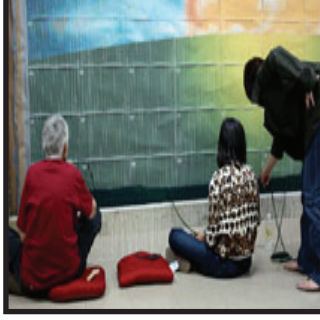
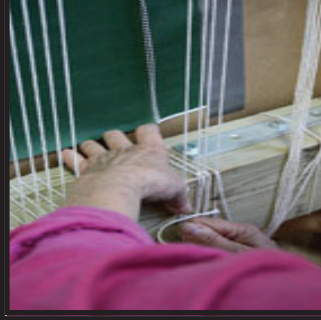
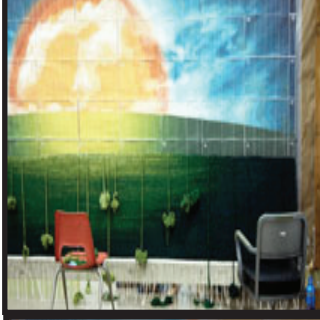
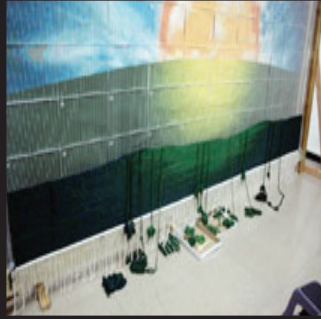
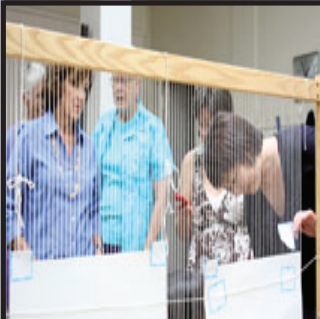
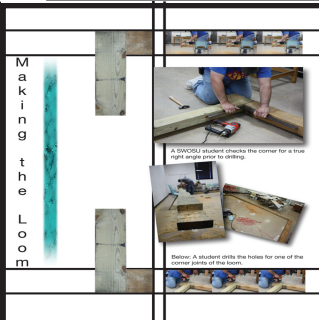
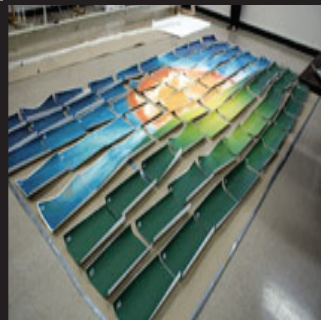
Westview

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West View

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Stylesheet

1. Electronic submissions are preferred. Submissions by post should be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper; prose should be double spaced. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope.
3. Electronic submissions are also preferred for artwork. Artwork submitted by post should be suitable for black and white reproduction. Work should be no larger than 8.5" x 14". However, photographs or slides of larger works may be submitted.
4. Include a brief biographical sketch for our contributors' notes.
5. Submissions and correspondence may be sent to Amanda Smith at westview@swosu.edu.
Hard copy submissions will be accepted until 2016 and should be sent to:
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Cover artwork by E.K. Jeong

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Foreword

We are delighted to present to you this much-anticipated issue of *Westview*. This issue contains the dynamic variety of short stories, creative non-fiction, prose, poetry, and visual art characteristic of *Westview*. It also heralds a new era for the journal as we welcome a new editor, Dr. Amanda T. Smith. Dr. Smith is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Language and Literature at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, where she teaches Composition and Editing. She holds an M.A. in English from the University of Colorado and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Connecticut, where she also worked as an assistant to bestselling novelist, Wally Lamb. Dr. Smith has had extensive experience as an editorial assistant and managing editor of *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, a peer-reviewed academic journal published quarterly by Taylor & Francis. In welcoming Dr. Smith we also thank James Silver for his service as *Westview* editor from 2004 to 2013. He deserves the majority of the credit for this current issue as he conducted the selection of submissions as well as the initial phases of proofreading and production. We deeply appreciate Dr. Silver's attention to detail and innovative vision. As always, we are also indebted to Fred Alsberg for his dedication to the journal as editor from 1992-2004. His expertise in creative writing is reflected in the impressive transformation the journal underwent during his tenure as well as his direction of the *Westview* Writers' Festival. Dr. Smith hopes to do justice to this rich history while expanding the journal's horizons with an online version, which will be introduced in the spring of 2014.

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The Time Thief

Qwen Pinckney

"May I join you, Mr. Mallin?"

I dragged my eyes away from the screen of the TV over the bar, looked up, and then up higher into a long, solemn, and ageless face. The man standing beside me must have been over six feet tall. He was thin, almost to the point of looking emaciated, yet I knew that this was no panhandler. His clothes were neat and obviously expensive: a black suit, a crisp white shirt, and a great, dark cloak that draped in an elegant cascade nearly to his ankles. Everything about him was long: his limbs, his salt-and-pepper hair, his pointed nose, and his chin, which was covered by a close-trimmed, gray beard. A mental cartoon image of Sleepy Hollow's Ichabod Crane came to mind, causing me to smile.

"May I sit down?" asked the man again. His deep voice seemed to echo, even though he spoke softly.

When I inclined my head toward the bench on the other side of the table, the stranger slid into the booth. For nearly a minute, the two of us studied each other silently. "Do I know you?" I asked, even though I was sure that I hadn't seen this man before.

"We have never met, Mr. Mallin," replied my mysterious companion. "The bartender told me your name and a bit about you. I'm curious to know whether what he told me was the truth."

I glanced toward the bar. Bill Wendale was on duty that night. He and I had gone to school together. In a small town, everyone always knows far too much about everyone else's business. I was sure that whatever Bill said would have been reasonably accurate, but it bothered me that he talked about me to a stranger. Then I realized that he might have been trying to do me a favor.

"Are you looking for someone to do some writing?" I asked. "I've done a few pieces for the local paper, and several of the local businesses have hired me to do ad copy. My prices are reasonable, but I—"

"No, Mr. Mallin, I have no need of your literary skills," interrupted the man. "I'm interested in your lifestyle. I seek people who are not likely to be missed if they were to be gone for a short period of time. I'm looking for someone who is free to come and go because they have no pressing obligations. I understand you might fit that description." His expression had remained solemn and his tone serious, but as he finished, his eyes twinkled. He chuckled at the look of caution that appeared on my face.

"I assure you, Mr. Mallin, that I am not a murderer or whatever else you seem to be imagining. How people use their time is both a personal passion and a professional interest. I make clocks, or rather my family does," the stranger explained.

He seemed about to say more but paused when he noticed the bartender approaching our table with two glasses. Bill set a mug of beer in front of me, scooping up my empty one as he gave my companion a tall, frosty glass with a

straw. I started to dig out my wallet. Bill shook his head. "He picked up this one," he said as he walked away.

"Mr. Mallin..."

"Russell," I said. "What do I call you?"

"My name is Datum Chronos."

I admit that I stared and could not keep from grinning. "Is that for real?"

"I'm afraid so. As I said, the family business is making clocks, and my parents wanted each of us to have a name that related in some way to our heritage." A smile spread slowly across his face, transforming it. "I've always felt that I got off easier than my siblings," he added.

"My brother's name is Pendulum, though we call him Pen. My sister's given name is Clepsydra, which is a type of water clock, but she prefers Clea, unless she's in a formal mood."

There seemed to be no way to respond. I was in the mood for solitude. I'd been trying for the last month to come up with an idea for an article that would appeal to a national audience. Though what I had done had been well accepted locally, I believed I was capable of much more, if only I could find the right story or angle. So far, none of my ideas seemed unique or original enough to earn me a national byline. I felt discouraged and, perhaps, a little desperate. I wasn't interested in being distracted by a casual conversation with someone who wasn't a potential client.

"If you're here because you think I fit your customer profile, I can save us both time. I'm not in the market for any clocks," I said.

"I'm quite sure you couldn't afford one of our timepieces," Datum replied. His face was carefully neutral, but his eyes betrayed amusement. "We cater to a very limited clientele. Each of our clocks and watches is unique, entirely unlike anything you'll find anywhere else in the world."

"Is that right? Well, I don't need a clock." It sounded like a typical sales pitch calculated to pique someone's interest. Yet something seemed odd about the way he spoke, with an underlying tone of certainty that made me curious. "So how much do these amazing wonders go for?"

"Our watches sell for a minimum of a hundred thousand dollars, and the clocks can go as high as fifty million dollars."

I'm sure my jaw dropped. I also spilled beer down the front of my shirt. Datum either didn't notice my reaction or was too polite to acknowledge it.

"How many do you sell at that price?" I wondered as I sipped up the mess.

"Last year we sold twenty-seven clocks and fourteen watches. This year we should do about the same."

Feeling stunned as I calculated the income that such sales would generate, my mind finally began to work properly. This was exactly the type of story that I hoped to find. Clocks for the rich and famous: it was the kind of article that the big magazines might accept, even from an unknown like me. I might even approach it from the angle of a company that made over a billion dollars a year by selling less than 50 items. If I was going to achieve my goal of becoming a serious journalist, this was an opportunity that was too good to pass up. I could hardly believe my good fortune.

"Look," I said, trying not to beg, "I'd like to do a feature article on your

company. You know, free publicity..." I trailed off as my companion frowned and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Mallin. We couldn't allow that. Our clients demand discretion. Exclusivity is part of our allure."

"I can be discreet. I'll give you editorial privileges. I'm sure we can work out something." I was begging, but I didn't care. Any hesitancy I'd felt when my tall visitor sat down was gone. I knew this was just what I needed. I was as excited as I was curious.

Datum Chronos sat quietly pondering my offer. He glanced around the bar, picked up his drink, and sipped while he studied me. "Perhaps if you told me more about yourself," he replied at last. "Do you have any other commitments over the next month? Would you be entirely free to work on such an endeavor?"

In my enthusiasm, I forgot the first part of our conversation. It didn't occur to me until much later that he had neatly brought us back to where he had begun. I nodded and gave him the story of my life. I told him I had grown up in this town and never strayed farther away than the local college. After graduating, I had worked in the town's only department store as a clerk, though I'd always wanted to write. When my grandmother died and left me the old farmhouse on the edge of town, along with a small monthly allowance, I quit my job to make a serious effort to become an author.

I explained that I was a loner, introverted by nature, with no close friends and no commitments to prevent me from giving this project my full attention. I mentioned that when I wasn't working, I enjoyed playing video games or watching whatever sporting event happened to be on the television, though I didn't admit that I spent far more time pursuing these pastimes than writing.

Datum Chronos listened attentively, slowly sipping his drink. He let me ramble where I would in my dissertation, interrupting only occasionally to ask a question.

By the time I finished, it was after ten o'clock. That wasn't late by my standards, but it was a weeknight, and the crowd was beginning to thin. Bill looked over inquiringly. I shook my head. Two beers was my normal limit. My companion was only halfway through his drink.

"So," I concluded, "will you let me write about your clocks?"

"You may lose your enthusiasm once you know our story," he warned.

But I was not to be deterred. "Tell me about your family."

Datum glanced over his shoulder at the couple in the next booth and then at two men talking loudly at a nearby table. He leaned toward me and spoke softly. "With a business such as ours, we must be careful. I'm willing to tell you some of our history, but not here. Is there somewhere we can talk that will be more private?"

"My place is at the edge of town. It's a ten-minute walk." I knew it would make more sense to suggest that we meet the following day, but I was afraid he might change his mind. When he appeared to hesitate, I pressed my case. "That would be best for me, since I'll want to take notes. I don't mind working late. I can show you samples of my work, if you'd like."

When my companion pulled out an old-fashioned pocket watch and opened the cover, I strained to see, wondering if it was worth the extravagant sums he

had mentioned earlier. It appeared to be a plain, sensible, and very ordinary timepiece. Datum noticed my interest and smiled. He had read my mind.

"This is a watch my father made many years ago. I'm afraid that I don't carry one of our finer pieces." He closed the case and tucked the watch back into an inner pocket of his cloak. "If you don't mind the hour, I would be happy to accompany you to your home, Mr. Mallin."

We both rose. I led the way outside. "Call me Russell," I said as he fell into step beside me on the sidewalk. "Do you have a car?"

"No. I came on foot as well. I enjoy exploring new places and getting a feel for the towns where I do business," he explained. "Perhaps you would be kind enough to mention anything of interest we might pass as we walk."

There wasn't a lot to show him. On the way home, I pointed out the courthouse, the post office, the office of the local newspaper, and the administrative building for the utility company. After unlocking the front door, I headed into my grandmother's parlor. As I turned on the lamp, Datum followed me into the room. I offered to take his coat, but he shook his head. While I lit a fire to chase away the chill, he settled in a chair near the window. My visitor watched without comment as I gathered up my notebook, a pen, and tape recorder. He looked dubiously at the latter but raised no objection when I turned it on.

"Now tell me about your clock business," I requested, settling back onto the couch.

"My family started building clocks two hundred years ago," Datum began. "Our pieces have always been distinctive, designed specifically for each individual customer. It was my father who developed a remarkable process that made our business what it is today. Eventually he passed the secret on to my brother, who perfected the technique. It's Pen who is the Time Master now.

"My sister handles the administrative duties. She pays the bills, manages our finances, and, most importantly, deals with our customers. Clea is quite brilliant, in her own way, and has an unerring sense for when a potential customer might not make the best use of our unique timepieces."

He started to explain how watches and clocks are made, but I interrupted him. "What is it you do?" I wondered.

"Are you here in town on business?"

"I travel a great deal in my quest to support the others," he replied evasively.

"They are the heart and soul of our little enterprise." He went on explaining the clockmaker's art. My guest spoke with fanatical enthusiasm about wheels, weights, and springs. He discussed the art of designing a face that is both elegant and useful, leaning forward while he used his long, bony hands to sculpt shapes in the air.

As he began to describe how his brother selected the right tone for a bell or chime, I glanced at my grandmother's mantle clock and saw that it was nearly two. I was tired and bored. I was no longer willing to be patient.

"This is all fascinating, but what exactly is it that makes your clocks and watches so unique?" I prompted. "Why are they worth the prices you mentioned earlier? If I'm to write an article on your family's business, that must be the key to the piece."

Datum leaned back in his chair. At that exact moment, the grandfather clock in the hall chimed the hour. My visitor smiled and nodded his head. "You're right, of course. What my father discovered, and then passed on to my brother, is how to capture and store time. All of our timepieces contain some measure of extra time that can be used at its owner's discretion."

"Extra time?" I repeated. "I don't understand."

"People work under deadlines every day, Mr. Mallin. The results are usually adequate but often less than perfect. Who hasn't wished that they had just a little extra time to finish something important, or that they could make a particularly memorable event last longer? Imagine that you're a composer faced with delivering a score in time for a grand opening performance. You know your work is good but that it would be great if only you had another month to work on it. Or, imagine that you're dying, with a lifelong ambition not quite realized. One of our timepieces could give you the extra time you seek."

I didn't believe it, not for a minute.

"How much time?" The question popped out before I could stop myself.

"That depends on the size of the item and on what the customer can afford," replied Datum. "Our watches accommodate up to a month of extra time. The largest clocks handle as much as a year, but we've found that any more than that tends to become unstable. Of course, if a customer wants more, they can always buy a second piece." He spoke matter-of-factly, as if what he said were rational.

"Are you saying that your watches have some sort of magic built into them? That's pretty hard to believe," I scoffed. "Your sister must be some salesman if she can convince anyone to pay the prices you mentioned for a fantasy."

"We consider it more of an undeveloped science than magic," replied my guest mildly.

He didn't seem the least bit annoyed by my skepticism.

"So you conjure up a little extra time and add that to each watch and clock. Where do you find people with that much money who are so gullible?"

"We don't manufacture time, Mr. Mallin," corrected Datum. "No one can do that. Every person is born with a finite allotment of time. What my father discovered is that time can be transferred from one person to another. That's what I do, Mr. Mallin. I procure what is needed for our clocks."

"You buy people's time?" This was getting more and more bizarre. I realized unhappily that the whole conversation had been a waste of my time.

"Well, no. As I'm sure you can appreciate, most people are reluctant to give up what time they have, so I steal it. I take it from those who waste it so that we

can sell it to those who will appreciate it.” As he talked, Datum reached into his pocket and again pulled out his watch.

“You steal time? That’s impossible.” My voice sounded a little hysterical. The man must be crazy. I wondered if the clock business and his colorful family were all figments of his imagination.

“I’m afraid, Mr. Mallin, that I’m about to prove you wrong,” responded my visitor. He placed his watch in the center of his open hand and held it out toward me.

I couldn’t help staring when it started to glow. A bright blue light filled the room. I tried to close my eyes, but the world seemed to be spinning around me, faster and faster. Just before I fell into darkness, I heard Datum Chronos laugh.

* * *

Should I end my story there, or should I go on? Should I explain that I awoke on the couch the next morning with a splitting headache, only to discover that it wasn’t the next morning, but rather a full month later? Should I describe my amazement and dismay to find four weeks’ worth of mail stacked neatly on the table beside the front door? Should I admit my appreciation for the man’s attention to detail after I discovered my tape recorder was empty, delivery of my newspaper had been stopped, and my phone and utility bills had all been paid a month in advance, in cash, by a tall man that no one had seen before or since?

I was astounded, outraged, and determined to recover what had been taken. Thirty-one days of my life were stolen, but no one would ever believe that it really happened. Nothing my visitor said that night was any help in tracking him down. I realized, soon after I began, that he never mentioned the name of his clock business or where it was based. I searched the town for clues. I spent considerable time on the Internet, hoping to find some reference to the Chronos family. When everything I tried failed, I brooded for nearly a month. Finally, I started to write. I am, after all, an author.

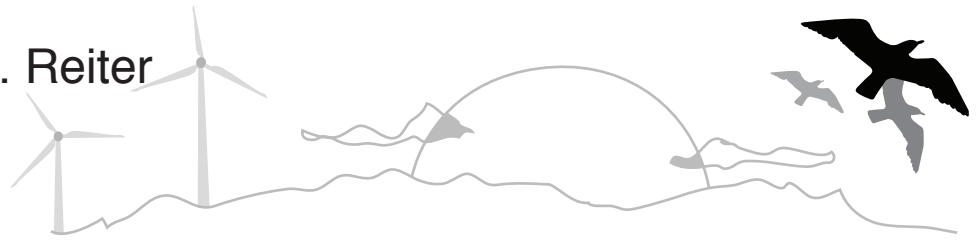
It usually takes me weeks to compose a piece, but this story was finished in a matter of days. I’m sure it’s the best thing I’ve ever written. If it sells, I’m considering a series—the ongoing saga of three siblings with unlikely names. Given the circumstances, I feel I have paid for the right to use what Datum told me.

The final irony is that I’ve accomplished more since that night than I have in the last ten years of my life. I’ve lost all interest in video games, gazing mindlessly at a TV screen, or any pursuit that wastes time. I’m writing most of every day now, and I see promising possibilities for stories that I would have ignored before.

In a strange way, Datum Chronos did me a favor. I sometimes wonder if any of the time thief’s other victims have been as fortunate.

Sea Gulls and Wind Farms

by Lora K. Reiter



Cruising west on 70,
Around a smoky hill in March,
I see a field of daisies where none should be.
It's the south side of a cattle lot sloping toward a pond.
But daisies by the hundreds, maybe thousands,
Cluster on the side hill, weaving, dancing,
Clean against the winter black and rust.
Some are sinking, lowering to the ground,
Losing themselves within the teeming white.
Others are rising, blowing upwards.
I see them organize, take shape, and sail and sweep,
Hulls made for racing on salt waves,
Wings like scimitars to cut blue slices from the sky,
Sea gulls riding high on Kansas winds.
I wonder if gulls flew here
When oceans moved upon these hills.
I used to wonder
Why seashells decorated stones of our old house.
Why sharks' teeth lay among our cattle's tracks.
What predator a huge and ancient turtle met,
Halved in one bite like a beetle in a beak,
Now a fossil in our creek bank.
In two more miles, I see a wind farm rise above the hills,
Wind mills white as gulls,
Their blades shimmering like knives
That cut a different pattern in the blue.
Magnificent and clean,
Silent from this distance,
They signify a future as far from me
As the ocean and its shells.

Caught between those stretches
Of time I cannot measure,
I think of gulls behind my father's tractor in the spring.
They dived and hopped for worms and grubs
While I, stretched in the long straight track
The plow's disk etched,
Watched them over fortresses turned out by shares,
Silver blades that cut deep in the soil,
Carving shining curves for me to kneel behind,
Calm with the smell of earth still cool below the sun,
Pleased by its purple, green, and blue,
Certain that my father soon would make another round,
Create for me a new sweet place to lie and think,
Not yet aware that that dear earth
Was itself quickly turning under all of us,
Me, my father, and the birds.



Illustration by SWOSU Design Studio

Faith and Reason: A Love Story

K.T. Landon

“How many of you think you will love your children right away?”

Liz, the instructor for our agency’s required pre-adoption class, paused and looked around the room. Sitting in chairs arranged in a large circle were twelve couples in the early stages of adopting children from China, Guatemala, and Korea. Every hand except mine, my husband’s, and one guy’s on the other side of the room was up. I could imagine the whispered conversations at the break—“Oh my God, the poor kid who gets them for parents”—but my hand stayed down.

“OK,” said Liz. She talked about what the adjustment is like for internationally adopted children and what our first meetings might be like with infants who have been uprooted from literally everything they have ever known—their caregivers, the language and food they are used to, the sights and sounds of their daily routines—and handed over to people who look, talk, and smell funny. She told the story of one woman whose new Chinese daughter cried ceaselessly for two days after the woman arrived in China to pick her up.

“I offered to look after the baby for an hour,” Liz said, “so that the woman, who was traveling alone, could have a break, probably so she could go upstairs and freak out on the phone to her husband. It took me almost all of that hour just to get the baby settled down.

“I knew that baby would be fine. I knew that the crying meant that she had been attached to her previous caregivers and would also be able to attach to her new family. But when you’ve been trying to quiet a crying baby for forty-eight hours, ‘love’ may not be exactly what you feel.”

Everybody nodded, but few seem convinced.

Liz went on to explain how attachment develops. The child has a need—she’s wet, she’s hungry, she wants to be held—and she cries. The parents meet the need by feeding or changing or holding the baby, and the baby is happy. Through repetition of this cycle of need and gratification, the baby learns to trust the parent, she said, and the parents learn that they are able to meet the child’s needs and feel more attached to the child.

At the break, we chatted, inevitably, with Ed, the other guy who didn’t raise his hand, the three of us eager to reassure ourselves that we weren’t heartless freaks, happy to think there was a kindred spirit in the group. He introduced us to his wife Gabrielle. Ed and Gabrielle lived in the same town as we did and were also adopting from China. It turned out that Ed, like us, was basing his expectations on his experience with the family dog.

* * *

Like many couples considering parenthood, we adopted a dog as a kind of trial run. A dog would be a much more significant and limiting commitment than the cats had ever been—no more taking off for the weekend without a lot

of advance planning—but we figured if we could handle keeping a dog alive, well, and happy, then we were ready for the next step.

On the web we found Save-a-Dog, an organization that rescues dogs from shelters in the Midwest and the South that don't have no-kill policies and fosters them in Massachusetts until homes can be found. As we were leaving our first Save-a-Dog meet-and-greet, we heard the organizers talking about a Yellow Lab.

"Any interest in Sadie?" one asked.

"No, not today," the other replied a little sadly. "No one's interested in an older dog." Ben caught my eye. I nodded.

"We're interested in Sadie," he said.

Two days later, we picked her up. While it wasn't what we had planned, we told ourselves that an older dog would make for an easier transition than a high-energy puppy.

But our "starter dog" had other ideas. She came with a urinary tract infection and kidney problems and needed to go out as soon as she got up in the morning, an occurrence that generally coincided with sunrise. She'd bonk her head into the side rails of our bed and then rub her side up and down the entire length of the bed, looking up occasionally to see if she was having the intended effect. I'd roll over and gaze bleary-eyed at the clock—5:00 a.m.—and then at Sadie, and I would think, *You have ruined my life*. She rested her chin on the mattress, her wet, black nose right next to my face, and smiled her doggy smile: mouth open, ears back, tail in slow but steady motion, thrilled that breakfast was in the offing.

I'd stand out in the yard with her, wearing my slippers, a baseball cap, and a raincoat over my pajamas, and then she would follow me in for breakfast, nudging me toward the kitchen with her nose. After a couple of weeks—once I'd gotten into the habit of setting up the coffee the night before—those early mornings were no longer a hardship but, instead, an opportunity to make someone else ridiculously happy every single day. Sadie's enthusiasm for breakfast—and dinner and indeed all things edible—never waned.

We all got used to each other, and getting up at 5:00 a.m. (or, mercifully, something closer to 7:00 a.m. in the winter) became the natural rhythm of our lives as a family with a dog. We addressed Sadie's medical problems and grinned at each other like idiots when, after four or five months, the vet told us that all her blood levels were, just barely, in the normal range. We hired a trainer and taught Sadie how to walk on a leash without pulling, how to sit, how to stay. We bragged to anyone who would listen that she was the only dog in her obedience class not to soil the floor.

And Sadie learned that she could count on us for food and fresh water, regular walks, treats for good behavior, and the occasional trip to the park. Sadie went from looking, our trainer said, "like she was so anxious she was crawling out of her skin" to being a happy, healthy dog. She wanted, ultimately, not much more than just to be with us, and she would follow us quietly from room to room; we'd look around and there she would be, chin on her paws, smiling and content.

* * *

After our last pre-adoption class, Gabrielle and I exchanged a few emails and set up a dinner with our husbands. We went to our favorite Sichuan restaurant,

and before the appetizers had arrived, we were comparing social workers, home studies, and the relative insensitivity of the infertility professionals we had dealt with. Ben and I had discussed our adoption plans with almost no one—not even our families—and it was a relief to talk about them freely with people as interested as we were.

“You really haven’t told your families yet?” Gabrielle asked incredulously. It was clear that she, unlike the rest of us, had no doubts whatsoever.

“We asked for twins!” she said. She was already at work decorating the nursery and babyproofing the house and was thinking seriously about leaving her job and just working on the house and other preparations until she and Ed got their referral.

We, on the other hand, had bought a video about adopting from China.

We were waiting on all major baby-related purchases and decorating. This sprang, in part from a kind of inherent emotional conservatism, but mostly from the recognition of how sad it would be to have a house all ready for a baby with no baby in it.

As dinner progressed from dan dan noodles and wontons in chili sauce to House Special Chicken with Dry Red Pepper and our second bottle of wine, the differences in our attitudes became clearer. Ed, Ben, and I were aware of all that could still go wrong and cautious in expressing our hopes for the future, but Gabrielle’s enthusiasm had a relentless quality to it. It washed over the rest of us like a tidal wave, leaving us flattened and a little demoralized in its wake.

When we dropped them off at home, we loaned Gabrielle and Ed our video, in which the parents each take a couple of shirts and a minimum number of changes of underwear for the two-week trip to China and practically need a sherpa for the pile of stuff they bring for their daughter, including clothes in a range of sizes, a two-week supply of each of several different kinds of infant formula, multiple types of bottles and nipples, toys, Cheerios, diapers, baby wipes, and an infant pharmacy that would make Hunter S. Thompson proud.

“Take notes!” we said, laughing.

We emailed a couple of times after that dinner, and Gabrielle was always saying we should get together again but never suggested a specific date. I sensed that she was not really interested in pursuing the connection, and the emails gradually stopped. Our attitudes and expectations about adoption appeared to be fundamentally irreconcilable, and conversation required so much self-editing to avoid seeming to question each other’s values that there was just no space to relax into a friendship. Perhaps, I thought, once our babies come home, we’ll have more in common.

* * *

There’s a Chinese folk tale that says that when a child is born, invisible red threads connect him to all the people who will be important in his life. As the child grows, the threads get shorter, drawing those people closer to him. I don’t think it’s possible to find a website about adoption from China that does not include a “red thread” reference in some form or other. More broadly, a belief in fate or predestination—sometimes explicitly invoked as God, sometimes more vaguely stated as “meant to be”—is very common among adoptive parents. Some of them seem to be hanging onto that red thread for dear life, some seem

to take it as a given, but not many discount it altogether.

Ben and I don't believe in fate. We are both software engineers whose professional lives are driven by logic and rationality, and we define ourselves by our minds. I was miffed when our social worker wrote up our home study with an introduction that described Ben as "intelligent" and me as "empathic."

"What about my graduating summa cum laude from an Ivy League college?" I asked. "What about my Phi Beta Kappa pin? How come you get to be the smart one?"

"K.T.," said my husband, "she had to make one of us look warm."

We don't think of our own relationship as fated. We agree that, while a certain amount of basic chemistry is required, we could both have had happy and fulfilling (though very different) relationships with others had we never been introduced at Mac World in 1995. But we chose each other then and choose each other still. If that sounds a little cool or too much a matter of the head rather than the heart, I can only say that someone who still chooses me every day after twelve years together is actually pretty romantic and gives our marriage a resilience that has seen us through a lot.

And so we don't believe that there is one specific child, somewhere in China, waiting for us.

* * *

At the Waiting Families group that my agency runs for families who have completed their home studies but not yet adopted a child, I feel like an atheist at a revival meeting. One recent Thursday we talked, as we do frequently, about how hard the wait is. Tears and anger are not uncommon at these meetings. Many of us have waited months or even years longer than we expected to.

"Well," says one participant, sighing, "I know there's a reason." Everybody in the group nods in agreement.

Yes, I think, the reason is that the government agency that handles adoptions in your child's country is moving very, very slowly. But that's not what she—not what anyone in this group—means.

The same gulf that separated me from Gabrielle seems to yawn at my feet in any conversation with all pre-adoptive parents. I believe that if they knew how I thought, I would be a pariah.

I mention to one prospective parent that I have given up reading the blogs that collect and publish web rumors about the Chinese adoption program—which families will get their referrals in the next monthly batch and whether the rules are changing or the program is likely to speed up in the near future.

"I agree with you that it can be a roller coaster," he says, "but I don't know what else to do. If I really didn't care about the adoption, I wouldn't be trying to get the latest news." I know that he isn't suggesting I don't care, but that's what I hear.

So I am silent, or I stick to the superficial topics of how hard it is to wait or where to find a nice crib that doesn't cost a fortune. My silence buys me an awkward sort of acceptance in the group. Or, more accurately, it buys me an acceptance of my awkward self, since all that self-suppression makes me, frankly, a little weird. I haunt the margins of small group conversations at the break, listening intently, almost never participating.

How much of this reticence is justified? Would these nice, kind people really reject me? I am not yet brave enough to find out. I choose inauthenticity, even if all it gets me is company, not a real connection.

But I long for that connection. Most days I feel so alone in this process, and it would be a relief to talk to someone who really understood. Sometimes I will see a parent and child holding hands, maybe waiting to cross the street or heading into swimming lessons at the Y, and the trust and intimacy in that gesture half breaks my heart. My friends are kind and sympathetic, but I've come to dread their questions—"You're still waiting? Is something wrong with your agency?"—that always seem to suggest I'm not doing enough to move things along.

What we all want in that group—rationalists and romantics alike—is some sense of agency in our own futures, however illusory. The decision to parent, fundamentally private for most people, is, in our case, subject to scrutiny and the possibility of denial by multiple agencies and national governments. Our input into the process ended the day we sent our dossiers off to the various countries from which we are adopting. Now, all we can do is wait.

But we show up at the meetings, each of us with a different way of thinking about the process that makes us feel we have some control. We clutch our theories—fate or God or reason—like talismans, a kind of shield against the impersonality of it all. "Look," we say, "we're not passive victims." It seems like we should have so much in common, but I always find in myself the impulse to argue about whose control is better, is "right."

Some days, I would give anything for the confidence these parents have—certain they are meant to be parents, certain they will love their children, certain their children will love them—but I can see no path to their point of view that doesn't involve surrendering critical thought entirely. And I know myself well enough to know that if I can't get there through reason, I won't be going.

I tell myself that I am better prepared for the realities of adoption—for a child who cries for two days straight, shuts down entirely, or prefers Ben to me—than those other parents are. But the possibility that I am wrong haunts me. I read somewhere that one of the common factors among children with good outcomes from international adoptions was the parents' belief that the relationship was "meant to be." Maybe that confidence, misplaced or not, gives them a psychic cushion to fall back on when the going gets rough.

I remember going, early in the process of deciding whether to adopt, to one of our agency's presentations. These programs always started off with a discussion led by a family that has recently adopted. On that night, the speakers were two parents who had with them their young son just home from Ethiopia.



Photo by Stephanie Ast

"You know," said the mother, "a lot of people talk about the red thread and all that, and I was like, 'Yeah, they take the parents' file from the top of one pile and the kid's file from the top of the other, and they just slap them together.' But," she continued, gazing at her son, "he is just so perfect for us. I can't imagine having any other child now."

* * *

In July, I was out walking Sadie on our usual Saturday-morning route when I ran into Gabrielle.

"Hey, how are you doing?" I asked. "Ed left me in May," she said.

"Oh my God," I said, "I'm so sorry. Are you OK?"

She appeared more angry than devastated. "It turned out that he never really wanted the adoption. We had a call from the agency saying they had a little boy for us in South America, and the next day Ed moved out."

She was outraged that Ed's lawyers had called the agency and canceled all adoption proceedings. I thought, *What else could they do?* but repeated only, "I'm so sorry," again and again. Gabrielle didn't want to be reasonable; she wanted to be mad.

She said she was going to try to keep the house, where she was living, now with only the dog. I asked, "Is there anything we can do to help you?"

"Well, I want to meet a man who wants children, so if you know anybody..."

"I'll send him your way," I replied, wondering how she could even consider it when Ed just left two months ago. She seemed so focused on having a child that a father was merely one of the requirements to be fulfilled along the way. Her intensity frightened me, so I didn't see the loss and fear that fueled her determination, didn't see that Gabrielle, too, is desperate for control. I remembered that Ed was the only other person who didn't raise his hand.

* * *

I was never one of those women who thought motherhood was my destiny. When I was still single in my early thirties, I assumed that children would not be a part of my life. Then I met Ben.

I could see having kids with Ben. Our first "date" after Mac World was dinner with the friends who had introduced us and their four children. Ben joked with the kids and made them laugh, asked questions, and seemed genuinely interested in what they had to say. And the kids—indeed, all kids—loved Ben; he takes them seriously, and they know it. His manner with them is a gentle combination of formality and easiness that is just adorable.

At the beginning of our pre-adoption class, Liz joked, "... and there's one of you, I don't know who you are, but I'll find out, who has read everything ever written about adoption." That was me, and I've read even more since then. To my mind, there's no problem that can't be attacked through research. I've read about adoption from China. I've read about attachment and bonding. I've read general parenting books. I've read adoption parenting books. I've read child-development books. I've read books about Chinese-American culture. Our China Adoption Video Collection now numbers six volumes and counting.

And I still feel completely unprepared.

Some of this, I recognize, is an effort to protect myself from hurt or disappointment. I tell myself that I will not be devastated by a baby who won't

look at me or who cries every day for months and will not be consoled.

It's a lie, of course. Yes, I will be prepared. Having read about all these possibilities, I will have had a chance to consider how I will respond, to visualize and rehearse the kind of mother I want to be in each situation. I will know from my research that the phase will pass. But I will still be devastated. A grief foreseen doesn't ache any less.

* * *

A couple of months ago, I passed Gabrielle's house and saw a "For Sale" sign in the yard.

I didn't call. A "Sold" sign soon followed. Last weekend, the sign was gone.

* * *

As of now, we have been waiting for two years and expect that we will receive our referral sometime this year. Personally, I expect to be too overwhelmed by the fact that we will be responsible for keeping an actual baby alive to feel much of anything else, at least for the first few days. But I don't doubt for a moment that we will learn to love our daughter and that she will learn to love us.

Because, of course, Sadie did not ruin our lives. Instead, she gently nudged our hearts open. We learned together the complicated dance of need and trust, sacrifice and commitment involved in caring for someone who depended on us for everything. Thanks to her, we got up the courage to send the paperwork to our adoption agency. We got a second dog so she would have company. And, last winter, we nursed Sadie through her long, final illness, a degenerative neurological condition. Our "practice child" died in January, and we are bereft.

For those who believe in fate, Sadie was the inevitable first step in the journey that will lead us to our child. For me, a combination of chance, choice, and work brought a dog from Ohio, halfway across the country, to help make us a family. That part is open to interpretation, and what you see depends on what you bring to the view. What I know for sure is that we loved Sadie, and she loved us. That's not how the story started, but that's the way it ends.

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Learning a New Game

Janet Jennings

We sit on the family
room floor to play Fish

for the first time. I show
my daughters how to shuffle,

cut, deal, match. We play
open hand. They don't know

yet about winning—proud
of the five big, blue-backed

cards they hold. We place
them face up on the brown,

stain-blended rug. Stella
Starfish, Leroy Lobster,

and their friends. Charlie
hands me her seahorse

to make a pair, lit up
with being the first

to spot a match. She gives
her cards away with such

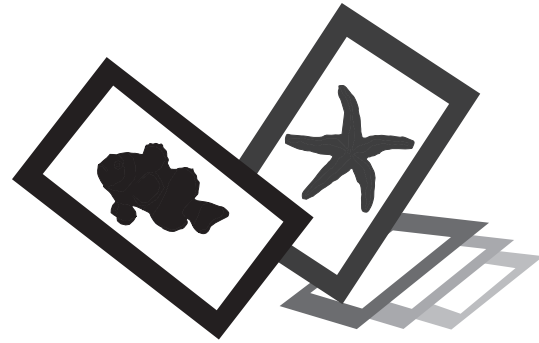


Illustration by SWOSU Design Studio

pleasure, and I catch
myself already tensed

with the habit of going
it alone, defending what's

mine. They are laughing,
my daughters, leaning in

to each other, making
sets of two on the floor.

Living close to the ground can
change things. Out

beyond the idea of winning
or losing, there is a world.

From Sow's Ear Review

Of Rivers and Remembrance

Jim W. Logan

Along the Canadian River in Western Oklahoma lies a quiet stretch of land where abandoned cellars and solitary old trees abloom on hillsides pay silent tribute to the past. The wind seems to whisper of hope, hardship, and perseverance. The earth resonates with voices and faces lost in time. On Memorial Day weekend a few years ago, I drove with my parents and a brother to Leedey, in lightly-traveled Dewey County, where my father had grown up. The most memorable stop that day was at an out-of-the-way place I could recall only vaguely from my youth.

Trail Cemetery, the resting place of my father's maternal grandparents, lay near the river at the end of an unpaved farm road. The small site was unpretentious, surrounded by fields and prairie, with a hand-written directory near the gate and two old cedars among the headstones. The morning was calm, and, except for some scissortails along a fence line, we were alone. Dad pointed out a knoll on the far side of the river where he'd played as a youngster. Across the road, wheat rustled softly where, a century earlier, the family homestead had stood. Nearby had been a post office, store, grain elevator, hotel, school, and the station of the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railroad. One could almost hear the echo of bells and community, young laughter that once rode winds of promise across a new state.

My father's recounting of his grandparents' story brought with it the realization that a genetic part of me, and of my children, had been with them. I left that morning with a sense of *déjà vu*, wanting to know more. Since that day, I've come to appreciate how easily lost and how irreplaceable are such connections to the past, and I wish I'd learned more of those early days when the chance was at hand. Both my parents are now gone, and, at sixty-eight, more mindful of the weight of moments, a part of me returns now and again to that setting.

My great-grandfather, George Allen, first looked upon the Canadian River when he was a young Texas trailhand. By 1870, the Chisholm Trail, beset by Indian problems, cattletick fever, and hostile Kansas landowners, had given way to a trail veering further west. The Great Western Cattle Trail forded the Red River at Doan's Crossing south of present-day Altus and skirted the Wichita Mountains on its way north. Over the next twenty years, seven million cattle would track the Great Western from deep in Texas, through the fringes of Indian lands, and on to Dodge City. Grazing on abundant grama, bluestem, and buffalo grass, longhorns worth four dollars a head in Texas brought ten times that in Kansas. Traces of the trail are still visible, and some of its first riders lie in rest where we stood that day, the Trail Cemetery, two miles south of the old Canadian River crossing.

Young George Allen had already seen much. His family was killed by Indians when he was twelve. Playing in a nearby tree, he'd escaped detection and was

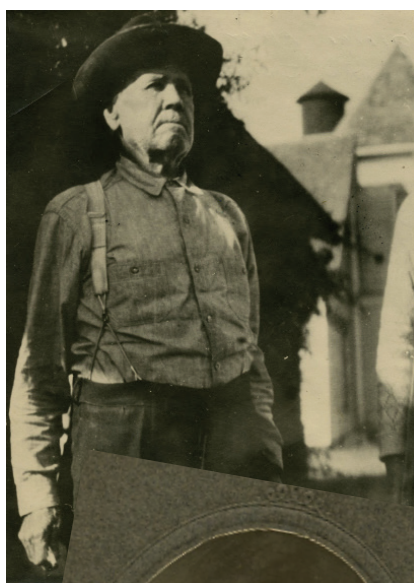
the lone survivor. He was taken in and raised by an old doctor and his wife. At manhood, he became a Texas Ranger and later herded longhorns north. On returning from one of these cattle drives, he told friends in Throckmorton County, Texas that he'd found a paradise on the Canadian River where water was plentiful and grass as tall as a man.

Oklahoma's beginnings mirrored, in many ways, our country's own, as people of diverse origin and status came seeking a new life. The historically unique land runs were made possible by numerous broken treaties and a young country's misguided notion of "manifest destiny" at the expense of the land's rightful inhabitants. Today, a large percentage of our population claims some Native American heritage. To be an Oklahoman, and an American, is to acknowledge the enormity of what the Natives lost.

The third of these runs, onto Cheyenne-Arapaho lands in April of 1892, saw nearly 30,000 settlers—with travel modes ranging from bare feet and bicycles to thoroughbred racers and hot-air balloons—vie for ownership of 3.5 million acres. Its announcement was purposely delayed until only a week beforehand, and my great-grandfather, now with a wife and family, did not participate. In time, however, with him and his wife each driving a covered wagon—and a son manning a two-wheeled, horse-drawn carriage with two greyhound pups aboard—they reached Oklahoma Territory. The land he wanted bordered the Canadian River near the cattle-crossing in an area known as Trail Flats. He purchased it for \$250, a team of mules, a set of harnesses, and a wagon.

They lived in a tent until their first home was finished, a two-room half-dugout of cedar logs, with a sod roof and a dirt floor. They raised wheat, corn, castor beans, cattle, and eight children. Six new counties originally came out of the 1892 run (Roger Mills, Dewey, Day, Custer, Washita, and Blaine) and the small town that sprang up across the road from what was called Trail, after the old cattle route, seven miles northeast of present-day Leedey. "Mr. Allen," as his wife Dovie called him, served as deputy U.S. Marshall and, when called upon, delivered babies, set broken limbs, and pulled teeth for those in need. The Allens aided travelers fording the river, helped many through their crucial first year, and donated the land for the first school.

Game was abundant, and fish were plentiful. Aside from tending their garden and orchard, they gathered black walnuts, pecans, persimmons, morels, and



Photos courtesy Jim W. Logan

plums, and wild grapes, and my great-grandparents made sorghum and cane molasses. There were dances, box suppers, taffy-pulls, plays, debates, spelling bees, and cipher matches. River baptisms were major events.

My grandmother once recounted childhood days when cowboys would come to the house to have a tooth pulled. There was no local anesthetic, and her father would seat his patients in an old rocker outside the barn, let them drink from a whiskey bottle until "ready," and bring out his forceps, whereupon my grandmother and her sisters, in what surely must have dealt a sobering blow to patient confidence, would bolt, screaming, for the house.

My grandmother's older brother and a friend once offered a silver dollar to her youngest brother if he could successfully kiss the rear end of the family mule. The bet was accepted. Not amused, the mule kicked the youngster, knocking him out cold and leaving a lifelong, horseshoe-shaped reminder of the encounter on his forehead. In time, the older brother and his friend were forgiven. The latter became my grandfather.

Tragedy was all too commonplace. Three-fourths of area women died before age fifty, many in childbirth. Men outlived them by ten years, and there was a high infant mortality rate. The Goodhue family was engulfed by a prairie fire on the very day of arrival to its claim. The mother and an infant child, burned beyond hope, died by the following morning and were buried, according to the woman's dying wish, on their new homestead. A half mile west, the McGill family's three-year-old son, trying to climb aboard a farm wagon driven by his father, fell beneath the wheels, and was crushed to death. His grave was placed at the corner of their field. When four more neighbor burials followed, the plot came to be known as New Hope, later as Trail Cemetery.

Over the decades, local concerns reflected the historical patterns that became legends of The Old West. Farmers and cattle ranchers clashed. The latter had leased huge grazing tracts from the Cheyenne-Arapaho before the run and were quick to grab up many of the better water sources. They showed little tolerance for "sod-busters," hanging troublesome farmers and shooting their stock. The killing of a Cheyenne tribesman sparked fears of a retaliatory uprising, flamed by the resurgence of the ghost dance and prophecies foretelling the end of white domination and the return of the buffalo. Many fearful families left. Outlaws Bill Doolin and Red Buck frequented the area, as did the Dalton brothers, who filed under assumed names on nearby land and kept a river hideout. Law and order were slow in coming. The area's aridity, isolation, and rugged terrain delayed the development of roads and railroads, and over ten years would pass before all lands were claimed. The first bridge across the Canadian came finally in 1905, located north of Taloga.

Western Oklahoma was a place of paradox: generous yet unforgiving, innocent yet brutal, an ally yet an adversary. It transformed, just as it was transformed by, those early settlers. Emblematic of the area was a wind that gusted and moaned, piled winter tumbleweeds against fence lines, and froze entire herds to death. The region spawned killer spring tornadoes and hail that left a year's labor shredded in the fields and reddened summer skies with dust. But it also instilled a trademark grit, and in its wake came late-afternoon breezes that rippled across wheat fields with the smell of rain and fresh-cut hay. Evenings

brought rose-colored light to earth, grass, and sage; nights brought clear, starry skies that seemed to peer down from eternity.

The seasons came and went, each with its images: spring redbuds and white-blossoming sand plums; wildflowers that followed the paths of rains across hillsides; the ripening green-gold wheat; the plowed, cinnamon earth; the fiery-prairie cottonwoods and scarlet sumac of autumn; and the copper-pink winter bluestem standing in contrast to the new, dark-green wheat and cedar.

The market crash of 1929 was prelude to the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. Cattle prices fell by 66% in the 1930s, and for three years, there was no wheat crop. The sun and wind peeled away the topsoil, and the pastures of plenty became the great American nightmare. The river went dry in '34 and '35, a third of Western Oklahoma's population left, and the Trail community, except for the cemetery, disappeared. One half of the farms were lost, among them the Allen place, shortly after my great-grandfather's death. But in time, the land and people recovered. One still sees the resilience in their faces.

Rolling hills of mixed-grass prairie dominate the landscape, but the river, more than any other feature, shapes and defines this country. The Canadian arises in New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, entering Oklahoma between western Ellis and Roger Mills counties and emptying,



906 miles from its source, into the Arkansas River in the eastern part of the state. Bordered in places by red bluffs, it's often mistakenly called the South Canadian to avoid confusion with its sister, the North Canadian branch. Damming and water extraction have reduced its flow to a tenth of what it had been in frontier times, and it bears little resemblance to most notions of what a river ought to be. Its sandy bed is often a mile wide, the result of countless course changes over the centuries, and its shallow stream meanders and braids like a bronze ribbon among the sandbars. Beneath it lies bedrock, often covered with several feet of the river's infamous quicksands. It drains an enormous area, changing with deadly suddenness after heavy rains from anemic trickle to rampaging destroyer. Accounts describe thirty-foot currents and tumbling walls of water a mile across, carrying huge trees, washing away hundred-acre fields overnight.

*Photo courtesy
Jim W. Logan*

The source of its name has long been debated. Some have linked it to the Spanish word *canadá*, a reference to the steep canyon walls near its headwaters. Early Spanish maps, however, labeled it Rio Colorado or "red river." Its French name, Riviere Rouge, had the same meaning, and the Kiowa and Comanche called it Goo-al-pa, meaning "beside a red hill." The most likely source derives from early French-Canadian trapper-traders who, traveling by canoe, camped near its confluence with the Arkansas River. Named for these voyageurs, it was called "River of the Canadians."

The river's history, full of time and a thousand stories, runs deep. Coronado and his Spanish army crossed it in 1541 in search of the fabled cities of gold. The French explored it two hundred years later. It was for two centuries the domain of the powerful Comanche and Kiowa and, later, of the Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho. Stephen Long charted its course for the United States in 1820, thinking he'd mapped the Red River. Nathaniel Boone, son of the American legend, followed twenty-three years later, and Captain Randolph Marcy, leading wagons of immigrant gold seekers, paralleled its south bank in 1849, marking the California Road.

The Antelope Hills rim the river in Roger Mills County and once formed the U.S. boundary with Mexico. The Canadian held strategic significance in the 1858 Texas Ranger expedition against Comanche and Kiowa, as well as both battles of Adobe Walls.

Charles Goodnight, on whom the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Lonesome Dove*, was largely based, forded it further west, against improbable odds, in an epic 1200-mile cattle drive to Wyoming. Custer's Seventh Cavalry crossed it in sub-freezing weather and deep snow en route to its attack on Black Kettle's Cheyenne village on the Washita, twenty miles south. Military journals describe horses breaking through river ice with their hooves, a difficult three-hour crossing with several animals and men falling, and the loss, on the return march, of a mounted cannon and mules to quicksand.

Day County, straddling the river, was originally one of the new counties created from the 1892 run, with its seat at Grand, on the north bank. Troublesome crossings after rains made it so inaccessible that its area was re-apportioned into Ellis and Roger Mills counties. A fixture at area courthouses was Temple Houston, son of

the Texas hero. A former lone-star congressman, he was deadly with a gun and considered one of the most brilliant young trial lawyers in the country. He was fluent in Spanish and French, spoke seven Indian dialects, and was the model for the central character in Edna Ferber's



Photo courtesy
Jim W. Logan

novel, *Cimarron*, the basis for 1931's Best Picture-winning film of the same name. Devout Texans will be unhappy to know that the man who dedicated their state capital in 1888 is buried at Woodward, Oklahoma.

The 1970s brought higher oil prices, the discovery of one of the world's most prolific natural gas fields, and the deep-drilling technology to get the gas to the surface. Almost overnight, a newfound worth and prosperity graced what was considered only average farmland, ranking it among the state's wealthier per-capita regions. Just hitting full stride across the area, thirty years later, is an abundant, previously-untapped, turbine-generated energy source offered by the one natural resource that western Oklahomans had always known: the wind. In all of Dewey, Roger Mills, and Ellis counties, the largest community, Shattuck, numbers only 1200. The region remains small-town America, with a certain

reassurance in the fact that nothing here changes much. Water towers and grain elevators of neighboring towns loom for miles in the distance under endless skies. In high school sports, fans are likely to see teams made up of descendants of the same immigrant farmers, cowboys, and Native Americans who once fought over the soil they now compete upon. A frontier-era warmth remains, with schools and churches still at the center. People know they're in it together, and there's a spirit of community born of both necessity and decency.

Some memories from my early boyhood in Cheyenne stand out. I remember the joyous, hopeful strains, loud enough for God to hear, of the congregation singing "Showers of Blessing" in the dry summers of the fifties. I remember the window-rattling roars in the old basketball gym on winter nights when the Hammon Warriors invaded, with players whose great-grandfathers had fought against Custer. I remember my grandfather's natural grace, at age sixty, on a horse at full gallop, in his last rodeo calf-rope event—paunch, bi-focals, false teeth and all. He was still something to behold. As old Mr. Tener himself of western-wear fame once remarked, "Your granddad was a *real* cowboy." I remember my grandmother standing beside the little house beneath the hilltop water tower, weather approaching, her dress blowing in the wind, her hand shielding her eyes as she looked westward toward SergeantMajor Creek to make sure my brothers and I were headed home. Years later, farmers in their fields along the highway stopped work and removed their hats as her funeral procession passed.



*Photo courtesy
Jim W. Logan*



Photo courtesy Jim W. Logan

I remember the way the old folks at family gatherings would sit and gaze at us youngsters—I had no idea why—for the longest time, a distant look in their eyes. Now, as the oldest, I've become the gazer, casting the same long, loving looks at the little ones, taking mental snapshots of moments, searching young faces for traces of the past and future, understanding more fully what I once did not.

It's said that in order to know who we are, we must know where we're from. I've come to realize that being an Oklahoman is something

one earns. My great-grandparents faced, in their lifetimes, Indian attack, prairie fire, flood, quicksand, drought, the Dust Bowl, a 1918 flu epidemic that killed twenty million, a World War, and the Great Depression. Once hazardous half-day river crossings now take a scenic minute. The Leedey tornado of '47 swept my grandparents' home from the earth. But the worst seemed to bring out the best in them. I'm humbled by who and what they were, and I hope that one day

my own children and grandchildren look back on my generation with the same love and respect.

With mankind today facing such an array of formidable problems, it is reassuring and important to know that we follow in the steps of those who, through belief in themselves and the essential promise of humanity, endured and overcame.

Sometimes, late at night, waiting for sleep, my mind returns to the place we stood that day, which, across time and distance, has become a part of me. I imagine myself there in the evening quiet, surrounded by the smell of the land, soft prairie voices, and the memory of those who went before. Moonlight rests on the midnight river. There is a sense that perhaps God watches also, and there is an unspoken awareness that, as rivers seek the sea, all things journey homeward to become again one.



Reading Joyce's *Ulysses*: Leopold Bloom

by Daniel Schwarz

"Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred." (Ulysses)
"I belong to a race, too, . . . that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant." (Ulysses)

His Jewish heritage pulsates through his veins,
 he feels exile, diasporic pain.
 Despite assimilation,
 compromise, and tolerance, he
 speaks boldly to such
 one-eyed monsters
 as Citizen Cyclops.

St. Leopold of Perpetual Responsibility,
 and Lamed Vov,
 visiting Mrs. Purefoy in her labor,
 caring for the widow Dignam
 loving Molly,
 at once his Calypso and Penelope.
 Living with hope of return,
 willfully ignoring the Blazing disruption
 of Eccles Street home,
 haunted by pentimento of
 father's suicide, infant son's
 death; guilt and loss are
 etched into his flesh like a tattoo.

His scars are psychic scars,
 like ones we all bear.
 His Hades, like ours, is within:
 fears, obsessions,
 dimly acknowledged needs.
 He, too, is teacher;
 his subject is humanity.
 He is Stephen's Nestor
 but also his Virgil,
 accompanying him—and, yes, us—
 through divinely human comedy.

Aging: my 71st Birthday

by Daniel Schwarz

I do not like to think about aging:

I dread: further reduced
sexual appetite, struggles
with forgotten names,
faces, highlighted by
embarrassing encounters
with people who remember a meeting
that is for me dim awareness or
blur, if it exists at all. When
reading obituaries of
friends, acquaintances, colleagues,
even celebrities, I think of others
who will read mine.

I could mention:

difficulty driving in dark,
watching tummy mysteriously
enlarge even though weight
doesn't change, painful knees
after tennis, digestive discomfort
if I eat more than usual.

Worse yet: fear that ideas
are not valued, words not heard,
presence disregarded, teaching archaic,
energy reduced. Yet nothing
inflects emptiness
more than lack
of grandchildren
as if setting sun
has no subsequent rising.

Yes, courage is required for
waging continuous struggle to
maintain mental faculties,
sustain sensory awareness
draw upon physical reservoir.
rage against coming of night,
savor every morsel of life,
delight in delicacy of each day,
love fervently, passionately.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

Poesía en Traducción: Poetry in Translation

In addition to offering years of dedication as *Westview* editor and creative writing instructor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Fred Alsberg has published numerous poems in a variety of journals and magazines, including the *Louisiana Review*, *Oklahoma Today*, the *Greensboro Review*, and *Sundog: the Southeast Review*. His chapbook, *Reassembling Dust*, was published in 2007 by Puddinghouse Press, which later published a collection of his themed poems, *Harry the Hack*, in 2012.

Three of Alsberg's previously-published poems appear in the pages that follow alongside translations by Cynthia Peña, who is a Spanish professor and the Spanish Program coordinator at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Peña co-authored the Spanish conversation book *Hablemos de teatro*, and her fields of expertise include twentieth-century prose poetry in Spain and Spanish America. In addition to her teaching and research, Peña has earned an M.A. in creative writing and has published a book of poetry titled *Collage sobre tinta y papel*.

The opportunity to work with fellow writers in the Department of Language and Literature inspired Peña to translate Alsberg's poems in addition to selections by fiction writer Kathy Toy Miller for a bilingual reading at SWOSU in 2009. The translation process was difficult at times; however, Peña says she liked noticing the unique rhythm of each poem and the way the words worked together, and she enjoyed the challenge of creating the same effect in Spanish.

The pairs of poems collected here reflect both Alsberg's poetic craft and Peña's craft in poetic translation, related but distinct pursuits. Whereas the poet must begin with his creative vision and only then modify his work with regard to restrictions based on his notions of form and propriety, the poetic translator must begin with the vision of her source poem and make creative judgment calls between the literal accuracy of her translation and the variations from literal accuracy that might more closely represent the spirit of that source poem.

This set of poems, positioned face to face in conversation with each other, reveals that translation is more a vibrant form of art than a mere exchange of one word for another. The word *translate* stems from the Latin term *translatum*, which means "to carry over." Peña's translations carry not only the words but also the tone and substance of Alsberg's poems across the boundary of language to an expanded audience. She also brings to these poems her own sound, rhythm, and perspective. Through the art of translation, Peña crafts pieces that resonate with Alsberg's visions while simultaneously transforming them into something entirely new.



Fred Alsberg and Cynthia Peña

Photo by Amanda Smith

Emptying the Mirror

by Fred Alsberg

A fringe of white hair
framing his lemur eyes,
he sits at the edge of the bed,
and the book in his hands
reminds him of when, as a boy,
turned pages were waves.
It seems to him that his body,
wrinkled and dry, has now curled;
he feels himself shrink inward

through bellies of birds and fish,
through shells and smaller shells and smaller still,
until for a moment, he looks outward
from a single cell,
before dissolving in water
that mends without a scar,
a sea that breaks upon the nothingness
where Buddha came to sit and rest.

From *Black River Review*

Vaciar el Espejo

by Fred Alsberg Translated by Cynthia Peña

Un fleco de pelo blanco
enmarca sus ojos espectrales de lémur
él se sienta a la orilla del lecho,
y el libro en sus manos
le recuerda de cuando, de niño,
las páginas pasadas eran como olas.
Le parecía que su cuerpo,
ajado y seco entonces, se había ondulado ahora;
se sentía encogerse hacia adentro

por barrigas de aves y peces,
por conchas y conchas más pequeñas y más pequeñas aún,
hasta que por un momento, él mira hacia afuera
desde una sola célula,
antes de disolverse en el agua
que se remienda sin dejar cicatriz alguna,
un mar que se abre hacia la nada
donde Buda vino a sentarse y descansar.

Oklahoma Windscape

by Fred Alsberg

Your currents
rush in gusts
through the invisible ocean
we live in.

In every tree,
crowds of leaves
rise in unison,
their seeds
setting out on journeys.

We, however,
hurry home,
hear murmurous friction,
you sharpening
yourself on stone.

In the eaves
you're a child
trying to breathe life
back into a broken whistle.

You set a-quiver
window panes,
you cause the stagger
of a loose shutter.

We huddle in basements,
in hallways,
pray our card house
of long-laid plans
won't get swept away.

From *Oklahoma Today*

Paisaje de viento de Oklahoma

by Fred Alsberg Translated by Cynthia Peña

Tus corrientes
ráfagas en racha
a través del invisible océano
en el que vivimos

En cada árbol
un tropel de hojas
ascienden al unísono
sus semillas
emprenden el viaje.

Nosotros, no obstante,
nos apresuramos a casa,
oímos la fricción que susurra,
tú afilándote
en la piedra.

En el alero
eres un niño
que trata de respirar vida
desde un silbido entrecortado.

Provocas un temblor
de cristales de ventanas
causas el tambaleo
de un postigo suelto.

Nos apiñamos en los sótanos,
en los vestíbulos,
ojalá que no puedas arrasar nuestro castillo de naipes,
hecho de planes largamente trazados.

Paperweight

by Fred Alsberg

Eight floors down
in a snow-covered parking lot,
a car is sawing itself free.

It leaves a black space its own shape,
then fishtails into the street
where traffic creeps as though underwater.

The whole city is submerged,
and snowflakes filter down
like fishfood in an aquarium,

to where people walk free of their footprints.

From *Blue Unicorn*

Pisapapeles

by Fred Alsberg Translated by Cynthia Peña

Ocho pisos abajo
en un estacionamiento cubierto de nieve,
un coche se libera con un efecto de sierra.

Deja un espacio oscuro hecho de su propia imagen,
y luego se menea hacia la calle
donde el tráfico se arrastra como si fuera submarino.

La ciudad entera está sumergida,
y los copos de nieve se filtran
como peces en acuario,

hacia donde la gente camina sin dejar huellas.

A Trifle

by Ivor C. Treby

My aunt would often say
If you want to catch a mackerel you don't plant beans.
Although at that tender age
neither an expert in agriculture nor fishing,
I was inclined to believe her.
She also said
Little boys who go into the currant bushes
won't find jelly and custard.
This was too tempting.
Well, I certainly looked.
But discovered only a dead thrush,
which I gleefully took to my cousin—
a thin, spotty girl in wire-frame spectacles
(who years later I heard grew into
a radiant beauty).
She, no sport, threatened to tell my aunt
(and did so), but that day learnt early
a different lesson
concerning the unpredictability of women:
my aunt was amused.
And there was jelly and custard for tea.
I was both disappointed and relieved
at finding the thrush.
I had heard other rumours
about currant bushes. And babies.

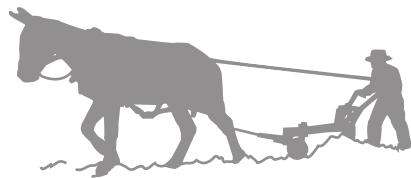


Illustration by SWOSU Design Studio

Pairs of Hands:

The Public Art Tapestry Project

Kevin Collins

Using my prerogative as a consumer of art, I refer here to the image on pages 42-43 of this journal as a sunset. Of the small number of people with the authority to correct this characterization, some agree, some disagree, and some offer no opinion.

In the hands of one of 25 people, a line of colored yarn passes horizontally between two vertical strands of off-white string in the same pair of hands, the strings being passed, the yarn doing the passing.

That intersection is called a “crossing.” Visually, each crossing blends the very limited meaning of the off-white string—it eventually expresses little more than verticality—with the richer meaning of the parti-colored yarn. Then each crossing is placed next to another, and each pair of crossings combines its meaning with another pair, and so on.

There are more than 300,000 such crossings in the Public Art Tapestry Project, *Sun on Earth*, constructed in 2009 and 2010 in the Art Building of Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. The project that was exhibited in eight Oklahoma and Texas museums beginning just hours after its completion in mid-2010. Together, these crossings present a stunningly schizophrenic vision: A realist’s fantasy, global in its locality, mocking with serenity.

But, “schizophrenic”? Those 25 pairs of hands!

Some pairs of hands created very few crossings; one pair created exactly one, and the experience might have given the individual attached to those hands a case of the willies. Other pairs created a couple dozen or a couple hundred crossings. I myself turned a few more than 100 crossings. But seven pairs of hands created enough crossings each to make them tired of the process, which some of them were at times.

Five of these seven pairs of hands created about 50,000 crossings each.

So as with any good schizophrenic, there is a dominant personality in the vision of the Public Art Tapestry Project, but it is distracted, tugged by the visions, among others, of someone who got the willies. (I mean, *the willies!*) It is tugged by me, a man who has reached age 57 without experiencing an artistic “vision.” It is strongly tugged by a couple pairs of hands that probably would have approached 50,000 crossings had one not arrived too late and the other left too soon. It is tugged by hands that didn’t like the work and by others that did, but not enough to continue. The tapestry is not quite in control of all its impulses.

The five central pairs of hands all belong to Western Oklahomans, but some have more solid claims to that title than others. Together, though, these people have seen much more of the world than I’d expect any five random Western

Oklahomans to have seen.

Carol Goyer plows the rough red earth as her people did before her, and her family's farm supports a few of the children of other Oklahomans. But she's seen the sights of North America and bits of Europe. I hear the Northern childhood in the voice of Mary Segal, but she left Minnesota and has taken root in Oklahoma, where she tends a menagerie that may have function but certainly has ornament. Myra Jennings grew up here, did microbiological research in Davis, California, did a long-term study in Gabon, central Africa, and returned to care for ailing parents. Christina Stone raised three children in Thomas—small and quiet even by Weatherford's standard—but she was raised in Sant'Arcangelo, Italy, where it can be hard to get a respite from arts-related events. EunKyung Jeong, eight years in Oklahoma, was raised in Korea and has seen Asia and Europe. She began an MFA program in the 90's at SUNY-New Paltz—taking remedial English courses at the same time—and she settled in Weatherford after earning her degree. (The sixth- and seventh-busiest pairs of hands complicate the vision even further: Melaine Campbell—whose interest in the project had to wane as her own master's program waxed—is a born Northerner who has seen both regions through biracial eyes; Huamin Wang—who joined the project only when it was well underway—is an official of the government of China who had come to Oklahoma to witness the birth and early infancy of a grandchild.)

Typical of Western Oklahomans and anything-but-typical, which is typical.

The 7' x 14' tapestry depicts a setting sun against both the blackness of encroaching night and the earth shifting from bright green to shadow. The bright, broad green restricts the piece's setting in time to only a few possible months in Western Oklahoma.

The piece certainly does depict just Western Oklahoma, yet it just as certainly depicts more: the arc of the horizon—though far less parabolic than the arc of the sun—suggests something like 1/32 of the circumference of the earth, too much arc to present just Oklahoma, a little too much to present just the Midwest. This "error" serves to conflate the mundane with the exotic in the eyes of many viewers.

(As with most questions I asked all of the owners of the five central pairs of hands, I received answers of "yes," "no," and "sorta" to my question concerning whether conflating the local with the universal was a conscious choice.)

In 2006, EunKyung Jeong had a vision not of a sunset, but of a massive communal art project that no one, two, or three artists could claim as their own. She pictured as few as four and as many as 20 artists conceiving, planning, and executing the project.

She gave free Saturday tapestry weaving workshops in the Weatherford Public Library, where she shook and guided several pairs of hands, some of which would make up the central group of five.

She talked with a department colleague at the time, Jan Bradfield, about the depressing reality that arts funding is not only meager but dependent on matching funds; there's a chance of having a worthy project funded, but it requires a tiny grant to be used as a match for a small grant, which can be a match for a so-so grant, etc.

Bradfield told Jeong that there was such a thing as the Weatherford Arts Council, then she literally pushed her colleague through the doorway and into the next W.A.C. meeting. The tiny local arts council (whose treasurer swallowed hard when the membership had voted a \$50 donation to the arts council of New Orleans just after Hurricane Katrina) voted to contribute \$1500 to the tapestry project.

Jeong began building matches, and with contributions from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, the City of Weatherford, the Oklahoma Arts Council, and the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, she was ready in 2007 to commit to the project.

As she was ordering the essential materials—including the massive oak slabs necessary to construct the 9' x 16' frame across which the tapestry would be strung—a fluctuating number of interested volunteers in face-to-face meetings, and later on Facebook, generated ideas about the local landscape, concluding that the two central elements must be the land and the sun. (These two, of course, are the dominant features of Western Oklahoma, but where in the world—even in places where they are notable for their absence—are the land or the sun not the dominant features?)

The discussion group, always in flux, considered and rejected dozens of designs from different sources. At one point, it considered a drawing similar to what the final design would look like, but with an important addition: a tiny black strip perpendicular to the horizon and marked with a sign as Highway 54.

It took the discussion group perhaps too long to eliminate the road and the sign for a good reason, but not for the most important reason: Highway 54, the local north-south artery, couldn't be perpendicular to the western horizon. (The more important reason that Highway 54 had to be eliminated, of course, was that its presence would have negated the suggestions of the Kalahari, of Nazca, and on some days even of Rangoon that eventually haunted the final work; it would have turned the work's exaggerated arc of the earth into a mere error in geometry.)

There were dozens of such debates, some not so conclusively settled, and the now-larger, now-smaller discussion group decided on the idea of an image.

Jeong produced drawing after drawing, each refined a little, until the group could offer no more criticisms. Jeong then scanned the image onto a computer program, expanded it to 7' x 14', and printed in early 2009, in sections, the "cartoon" that was to be mounted behind the huge frame to serve as a guide for the weavers. The off-white strings were hung vertically, the frame, and the weaving was begun in the spring.

Student assistant Nikki Jantzen mixed the yarns into color combinations and videotaped the developing tapestry. When she graduated and got married in 2010, student assistant Martin Lopez took over these and other chores.

At the start of the weaving, everything seemed to be going smoothly for the project with the important exception of its founding vision: the idea of an artwork that is communal rather than personal. The weavers tended to defer to Jeong as problems arose. As the colored yarn crept a few inches up the frame, it started to seem a little like the work of "Jeong and some helpers" rather than like a genuine community project.





Photo by E.K. Jeong

Like some other problems that troubled the project, this one solved itself. Jeong was enrolled in a Ph.D program. While she took online courses during the regular school year, she was required to be in Texas for the summer. The weavers, just comfortable enough after nearly two months of work, decided to push on in Jeong's absence rather than put the project on hold.

Five pairs of hands pursued the work of the summer of 2009—Jeong was absent, Campbell was still involved, and Wang had yet to arrive—and these hands gained an authority over the project that had been threatened by the presence of the mother hen. They raised and settled significant as well as silly disputes. Jeong was available by email, but the advice she could offer from Texas was limited. The group, with a new leader not just every day but with every new utterance, made, executed, regretted, undid, remade, re-executed, and congratulated itself for communal artistic decisions. By the time that Jeong returned in mid-July, she was the slacker, the single remaining weaver who had made the least contribution to the physical construction of the work. At this



Photo by E.K. Jeong

point, there was no sole proprietor of the tapestry project: it was a corporate effort, a communal effort. The group more than welcomed the return of Jeong, but it was prepared to question her, to challenge her, and often enough to prevail.

As the summer of 2009 passed into autumn, Campbell became less and less involved in the twice-weekly construction sessions, and the personality of the group reflected the personalities of the remaining five central pairs of hands: Jeong, Segal, and Goyer dominated that personality, each with a different brand of cheerful

stoicism; Stone was more passionate on strictly aesthetic matters, and Jennings most passionate of all on aesthetic matters, on the situation in Iraq, and occasionally on the price of tea in China.

Autumn passed into winter—and the yarn passed the halfway point on the frame—when Wang joined the group, repeating some of the errors that others had made months before. Some had the urge to lecture the newcomer, but all recognized in her, in addition to the same errors, the same sorts of enthusiasm

and wonder that they had felt months before. As Campbell had been, Wang was recognized as an essential part of the group before she returned to China in late April, 2010.

Winter passed into spring, and the end of the project was in sight. Jeong arranged to exhibit the tapestry in the summer, the fall, and the following winter at three nearby colleges and five nearby museums. The group agreed to aim for entry into the Fiberworks 2010 competition in June in the state capitol, an effort that would require a furious finishing kick at the end of a marathon. The group, minus Jeong—who again disappeared into Texas—agreed to team-teach a course on tapestry weaving for children at the Weatherford Arts Council's Summer Arts Academy in July, a course that was voted the children's favorite.

When Southwestern Oklahoma State University bought a substantial Main Street building, several local arts groups made an appeal to the president that a portion of the building be dedicated as secure exhibition space for the university, something it has never had before. Jennings represented the tapestry group for the appeal. The SWOSU Main Street facility opened in 2012 and has already hosted three art exhibitions, including a fund-raiser for the local hospital. In the year-and-a-half that it has been open, the gallery has dramatically altered the cultural life of Weatherford.

The day after the last crossing was secured on *Sun on Earth*, the group delivered the tapestry to the Fiberworks Show in Oklahoma City, where it dominated both the visual space and the conversation. After that exhibition, it visited the Route 66 Museum; the Thomas Stafford Museum; the Frisco Center; Redlands College; Texas Tech University; the Underground Downtown Gallery in Lubbock, Texas; and the National Ranching Heritage Museum.

The core weavers have continued their travels, and when they walk into world museums, they now walk in as accomplished artists. One has been teaching a college course in tapestry, another has begun a master's program in art, and all—transformed by their years at work on their communal project—have produced solo tapestries to complement the larger work at future exhibitions.

The world was changed a little by 300,000 crossings of colored yarn with off-white string and also by the 200,000 crossings turned on practice looms by the five, the seven, and the 25 pairs of hands. The world was changed a little by other works of art by the same group, such as the odd Thanksgiving dinner adjacent to an ornamental menagerie on a rough patch of land dominated by the sun, a dinner at which people shared memories of Minnesota, Korea, San Francisco, and Gabon. Dinners like that are rare in Western Oklahoma, but they happen. They are rare all over the world, but they happen.



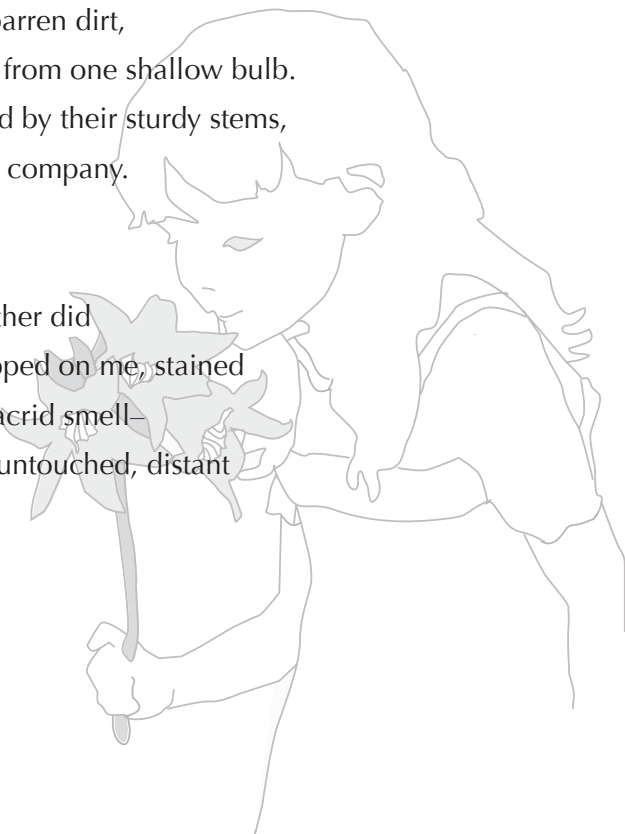
Naked Ladies

(Amaryllis Belladonna)

by Rachel de Baere



After school each day, the road I walked
was dense with cars and heat.
Strangers in strange houses peered from behind curtains—
men with desire for little girls and old women
who wanted to poison me.
I was told to cross the street when I saw them.
My mother's house
was dark with aches, smells of burned beans
and forgotten wet laundry.
Black lines of ants marched in single file on counter corners
and linoleum floors.
I washed my mother's pain, disinfected the smells,
wiped away the ants, gathered dirty wine glasses.
I had never seen them, growing wild in barren dirt,
sprouting in populous bunches, so many from one shallow bulb.
Soothed by their pastel pink, strengthened by their sturdy stems,
I wanted to bring them home to keep me company.
The day I cut those virginal flowers,
lacerated them at the base of the bulb
with a sharp rock, I was doing as my mother did
to buds in her own yard. Their juices dripped on me, stained
my clothes, my legs, my bare feet. Their acrid smell—
the scent of theft—was better left behind, untouched, distant
as a part of wild beauty
not to be brought home, ever.



Illustrations by SWOSU Design Studio

Pause

by David Scronce

We met in an interregnum
between domestic loves
though I couldn't know it at the time.

Dangerous Liaisons

proclaimed the movie poster
stretched above his bed.

(My ex had shelved the novel
next to Robbe-Grillet.)

The deed accomplished,
he informs me that he's poz.

(That was dating, later Eighties.)

I can almost see his brown mustache.

He called a time or two.

I didn't call him back.



Illustrations by SWOSU Design Studio

Menage

by David Scronce

I was married in Manhattan in the Eighties.
We read about Gay Cancer in the *Times*.
We'd skate the West Side Highway, gliding safely
Above the docks where brothers diced their lives.
Monogamy's a cocktail of convenience,
First focus later interlaced with fear;
Which wasn't how it started: In a three-way
Seventeen met Thirty, Thirty-Five—
A studio, a weekend in La Jolla,
The kitchen/toilet vista of the cove,
A kiss that brought exclusive hopes to mind
And dropped the extra from our tightening *folie*.
I didn't know I'd need the House of Vogue,
The many-postured comforts of my kind.



Illustrations by SWOSU Design Studio

Brothers

Matthew Perron

Donny Green sat, listless, in his father's recliner, listening to the realtor and the young couple talking in the kitchen. He checked his watch. Thirty minutes remained until he had to beg Nelson for a job. His insides recoiled at the thought of asking his older brother for a favor. But the nagging reality of being 45 years of age, being unemployed, and having returned to sleep in his childhood bed left little choice. He rose to his feet, strode to the kitchen doorway, and cleared his throat.

Three heads turned. The young brunette gave her lower lip a quick tug with her top teeth.

This flattery, perhaps because it was unintentional, made Donny feel better, so he focused a quick smile on her to let her know he'd noticed. "Got to be somewhere in fifteen minutes," he said to the realtor.

He nodded. "Okay. Your parents left me a key. I'll lock up."

Donny grabbed his own keys from the pegboard hanging next to the fridge, flashed the young wife a last grin, and left the apartment.

As he walked down Court Street, the ping of an aluminum bat sparked a thrill of recognition.

Through a chain-link fence, he saw a group of boys taking turns hitting, pitching, and defending the left side of the concrete field at Carroll Park, just as he had done 30 years ago. He crossed the street, leaned against the post of an open gate, and lit a cigarette. A batter lofted a fly into the gnarled branches of the giant tree protruding from the pavement in deep left, an automatic double when Donny had played. Beyond the center field fence, a group of older men played bocce. Some of them looked like the ones he remembered from boyhood. After one of his countless home runs to center, he'd loved to watch them curse and rub the ball against the pavement before throwing it back. He chuckled and sat on the first-base bench.

A new batter trotted in from shortstop.

"Hey," Donny said as the kid picked up the bat. "How 'bout a few hacks?"

"Got to field to hit."

Donny stepped on his smoke and walked toward him. "Just three swings."

The kid shrugged, handed over the bat, and hooked his thumbs into the loops of his low-hanging shorts to watch.

Donny took a practice cut, and the bat all but whipped around on its own. If he'd had a stick like this, he could've terrorized the bocce court.

The pitcher turned toward the fielders. "The old guy gets three swings."

Donny wondered how anyone could throw a baseball without getting caught up in a shirt that big, and he squared his feet in the batter's box. "Old, my ass; pitch the ball." He swung hard and drove the ball straight into the pavement, where it bounced up to glance off his thigh.

The pitcher laughed. "Everybody take a few steps back."

Donny relaxed and got the second pitch right on the sweet spot. The ball arched toward the old men. But some floppy-haired kid loped over, and the ball dropped harmlessly into his glove five feet short of the fence. "What the hell?" Donny whispered. He handed the bat back to baggy-shorts. "That's it for me," he said, rubbing the muscle under his right armpit. "Just missed it," he lied.

"Where you going, old fart?" the pitcher said.

Donny gave him the finger and walked back through the gate. He checked his watch: still 15 minutes. Across the street, a crane stretched into the low Brooklyn sky. He stopped in front of the construction site and peered through a hole in the temporary wooden wall. A gaping and empty hole in the ground filled him with morbid fascination. Not a worker in sight, here was the embodiment of the economics threatening to bury him. He stood longer than he should have with his eye to the peephole, dreading the meeting, until he finally forced himself to continue down the sidewalk.

At the pizzeria, his brother sat back-to-the-door in a booth with a newspaper spread over the plastic tablecloth. As Donny approached, he stared at the circle of scalp spreading over the crown of Nelson's head and absentmindedly rubbed the stubborn paunch forming above his own belt before clapping his brother's shoulder.

Nelson smiled, shook his hand, and rose to give him a half-hug. "Here he is. The prince of the runway returns."

Donny laughed and dropped onto the lumpy bench. "Yeah, the glamorous life..." he shrugged, "not all it's cracked up to be."

"How long you been back?"

"About a month and a half."

"Get out of here."

"I called you around three weeks ago."

"Three weeks?" Nelson shook his head. "I can barely keep my head above water these days."

"How're Sheila and the kids?"

"Sheila's fine. The kids are growing up."

Donny nodded. "Used to be when I arrived they'd jump on my back, beg me to do a handstand or juggle fruit from the fridge. Last time, they couldn't be bothered."

"You've only been by—what?—two or three times in the last five years?"

This was not a turn in the conversation that Donny wanted to pursue. "Man, look at this place." He waved at the white statues, pots of plastic flowers, and framed cat photos hanging on the wood-paneled walls. "Hasn't changed a bit."

"Some things never do."

Donny ignored the dig. "Well, this neighborhood certainly has," he said. "Can you believe Mom and Dad are selling?"

"No, especially now that the area is actually nice."

"You never could've convinced me all those boarded-up storefronts on Smith and Court would ever open again, let alone become boutiques and sushi restaurants. Damn, used to be nothing on Smith Street but dime bags."

Nelson shook his head. "Now my daughters go there for designer clothes."

A mustached, middle-aged waiter wearing a black vest over a white shirt approached.

"You guys drinking?"

"Bottle of wine?" Nelson said.

"Got a shoot tomorrow on a river up in Westchester, and I have to wear a bathing suit. Can't be bloated."

"For who?"

"Cigarette company. Probably wind up flying off some fricking rope swing into the freezing water twenty times. But it's the first job I've landed since I've been back." He shrugged. "Who knows when the next one comes?"

"Well ... at least you smoke." Nelson turned to the waiter. "I'll have a glass of the house red."

"Just water," Donny said.

The waiter dropped a couple of menus on the table and walked to the bar.

Donny read the choices and had to eliminate almost all of them. "I can't even remember the last time I ate pasta."

"Not even in Milan?"

"Especially in Milan." He made a half-circle with his index figure under his jaw. "Not chiseled, no work. By the end over there, I practically lived at the gym, and I still couldn't sniff a shoot."

The waiter returned with his pad. Nelson ordered lasagna. Donny asked for grilled chicken on a bed of lettuce, light on the oil.

"And that's why you're back?" Nelson said.

"Fact is, I'd love to still have the lean, smooth-skinned good looks that sell. But I'm losing it, and it's not going to get any better, is it?"

"You had to know this day was coming. But, knowing you, you haven't saved a dime, have you?"

"No."

"Tell me you didn't arrange this lunch to ask me for money, because you're as bad a risk as I can imagine."

Donny slowly shook his head and forced himself to let the insult pass. This was no time to fall into old habits. "I don't want your money," he said.

"Well then, what do you want?"

"Nowadays, you need a résumé to get a bartending gig," Donny said. "Forty-five years old with a high school diploma and no experience doesn't leave a lot of choices. Modeling may be ending, but I've still got some looks."

Nelson only nodded.

Donny put his elbows on the table and leaned toward Nelson. "I need you to help me get a job at your company."

"The streets are crawling with people looking for work, and you have no sales experience."

"I've been selling myself for twenty-five years."

"No, you've been gallivanting around the world boning runway models. Meanwhile, I've been back here busting my ass and raising a family."

"Believe me, I didn't want to ask."

Nelson sipped his wine. "My boss isn't going to let me hire you without some kind of résumé," he said.

"We could write one together."

Nelson gulped the last of his wine, put the glass on the table, then sat back in the booth.

"Donny, I'm your brother and I'd love to help you, despite your faults, but we sell software you know nothing about."

"So tell me about it."

"It allows people to hook up to a server without a computer. All you need is a screen, a keyboard, and a stick-drive."

"Sounds great, like it would sell itself."

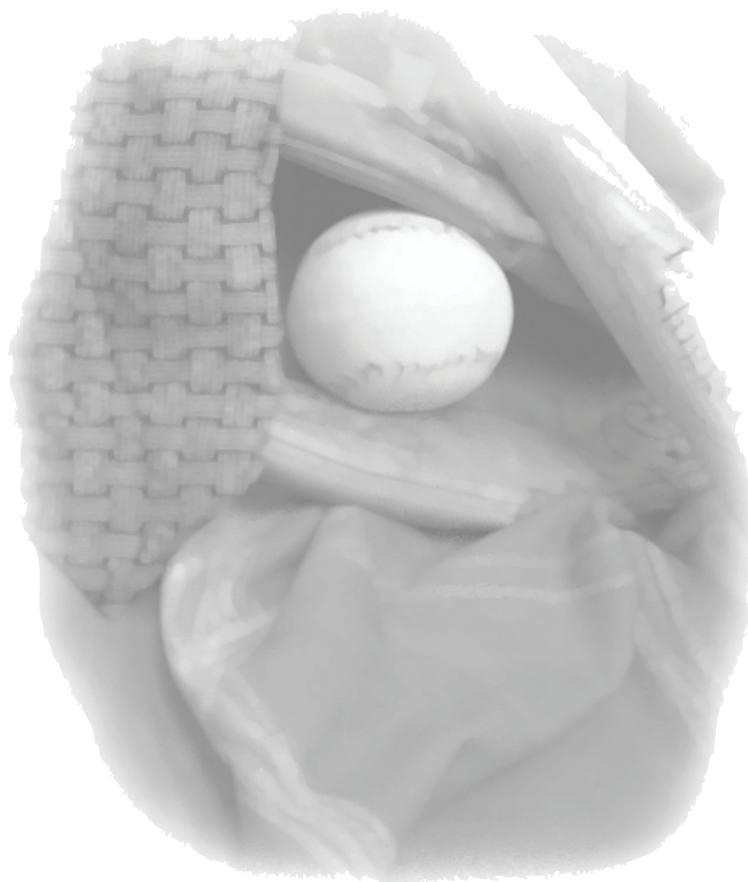


Illustration by SWOSU Design Studio

"It's more complicated than that."

Donny twitched nervously. "Just give me a chance," he pleaded.

"Careful. Hot," the waiter said, placing Nelson's lasagna before him, then plopping Donny's chicken onto the table without a word and going back to wipe silverware at the bar.

They ate in silence.

"You know it's only a matter of time before the agency drops me," Donny finally said.

"I'm sorry to hear that, but really, it's not my decision."

"I know I didn't go to college. But I'm no idiot. I've been around, and I understand people. Just give me a chance; you don't even have to pay me until I make a sale."

Nelson squirmed in the booth and looked at the row of bottles behind the bar. "You're putting

me on the spot." He sighed. "All right, I'll give you some literature. But I'm not promising anything."

Donny nearly spilled his water lunging across the table to shake his hand. "Thanks, man. You won't regret it."

* * *

"Morning, Donny," said Liza, the brunette receptionist, as she gave him a glinting smile, flashing her fetchingly misaligned teeth. Since his first day at the office, she'd been sending signals he'd ignored for the sake of his brother and the job. But it hadn't been easy. Liza, so different from the women he'd dated in Europe, with her Long Island accent, pug nose, and field-hockey build, had taken an erotic hold of him. And why had he been restraining himself? After a month of cold calling, he'd soon felt as empty and disinterested as he'd felt

when he was unemployed.

"Love those earrings," he said. "Where'd you get them?"

"Really? You like them?" She tilted her head and lifted a hoop with her fingertips. "Sample sale in Soho."

"Very tasteful," he said. "Feel like getting lunch today?"

"Love to. Any place special?"

"It's a surprise. See you at noon." He went to the kitchen for a cup of coffee and discussed last night's Mets loss with a fellow salesman for longer than was prudent. When he finally arrived at his cubicle, he stared down at the phone. Finally, he reached for it and noticed Nelson standing in the cubicle doorway.

"I can't believe, after I stick my neck out for you, that you're pulling this crap," he said.

"Pulling what crap?"

"The same crap you always pull."

"For Christ's sake, Nelson, not again."

Nelson sat on the corner of the desk. "Liza is only twenty-three. Why the hell are you chasing her?"

Donny leaned away from his accusing finger. "Who says I am?"

"I just saw you ask her out."

"For lunch."

"When it comes to you and women, it's always only about one thing, and it ain't lunch."

"Man, how many times do I have to tell you? Me and Sheila went on a couple of dates before you two even met. So what? It was nothing. Do you badger her like this, too?"

Nelson looked away and his shoulders slumped.

"I might've known. You've never even mentioned it to her, have you?"

Nelson stared over the top of the cubicle and didn't reply.

"We're getting a little old for this kind of jealousy, don't you think?"

Nelson stiffened. "You haven't changed a bit," he hissed under his breath.

Donny picked up the receiver. "You mind? I've got work to do."

* * *

Donny and Liza entered a sushi place on 53rd. Donny pulled out a chair for her at a table by the corner of the bar. "Would you like a drink?"

"Sure. Orange vodka and 7 Up," she said, ordering the sweet drink without the slightest self-consciousness.

Donny ordered at the bar, then he placed her cocktail and his beer on the table and sat across from her. "Lots of sushi places in New York aren't even Japanese owned," he said.

"How can you tell?"

"In Japan, there's no salmon with cream cheese or boiled shrimp roll, and none of the sushi is flash-fried or glazed. And see that guy?" He pointed to one of the chefs slicing with his knives.

She nodded.

"In Japan, sushi chefs have to study for twelve years. That guy ... all he needs is a hat and this." He touched his fingers to the skin behind his eyes and pulled his lids narrow. "For all we know, he's Korean."

For a moment she only looked at him, long enough for him to regret the stupid joke. Then she burst into laughter.

The waiter arrived to take their order. Donny was pleased to note that she didn't order anything he'd mentioned.

"Did you live in Japan too?" she said.

"Tokyo, for a year."

"It must be interesting to have lived in so many different places. Say something Japanese."

"Doh ee tashi mashti."

She cocked an eyebrow. "And what does that mean?"

"It means thank you. Westerners walk around saying don't touch my moustache." He chuckled.

Those teeth ... Donny felt a stirring in his loins.

The waiter laid a porcelain platter of sushi between them. Liza, with her charming lack of pretension, ate with her fingers. They gossiped harmlessly about other people in the office, and she told Donny about the restaurants in Forrest Hills, where she lived with some girlfriends. "Would you like to have dinner this weekend?" he said as they finished their second drink.

"You mean a date?"

Her raised eyebrows surprised him, but it was too late to turn back now. "Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, we work together." She dropped a tuna roll into her dish of soy sauce. "And you're old enough to be my father."

The room seemed to recede. How hadn't he seen this coming? He'd always prided himself on his ability to gauge what women wanted, and he'd been positive that Liza was interested. Suddenly, it seemed hard to be sure of anything. Gestures she'd made tumbled through his mind, the times he'd caught her staring, the dream she said she'd had about him, the lingering touch of fingers when he passed her a newspaper.

A chair grated against the floor and broke his trance. She sat before him chewing her food, oblivious. "Hope I haven't made you uncomfortable," he said.

She picked up the roll. A greenish-brown drop trailed down her wrist. "Of course not," she said, popping it into her mouth and swiping her arm with a napkin. He lacked even the power to embarrass her. For the rest of the lunch, she told him stories about ridiculous young guys hitting on her in bars, treating him like a doting uncle. Donny maintained a wry grin.

Back at his desk, he stared into his blank monitor at the crinkles forming at the corners of his eyes, then lowered his chin and rubbed the fat collecting on his jaw. It was a relief to pick up the phone.

* * *

After work, Donny climbed the subway steps. A mingled murmur of laughter and children's shouts emanated from Carroll Park, so he cut through on the way home, eager for distraction. What galled him most of all was that on the way to that ridiculous lunch, he'd strutted past his brother's office door as though he were modeling a \$10,000 Italian suit. And, as if that weren't enough of a conceit, he'd smiled at the scowl contorting his brother's face. It seemed neither

of them had matured a day since they stopped having to share a room. As he walked under the high boughs of the trees past the World War I Memorial, he saw the old neighborhood guys playing bocce in the fenced court, and he sat on a bench by an adjacent horseshoe pit to watch.

The men were scattered, standing or sitting on white plastic chairs. Some wore ball caps and others fedoras; many wore gaudy watches, gold bracelets, or both. A few had canes leaning against armrests where they sat. The smell of cigars hung below a dissipating cloud. Donny heard the distant chatter of the boys playing baseball and looked back through the chain links, hoping one of them could clear the wall and force the somnolent old men to respond. But the fence rose tall and implacable between them. One of the old men said something. Suddenly, the rest began to guffaw. They shouted, pointed at one another, and their mirth seemed to multiply until some were bent over, holding their stomachs.

Watching them, Donny felt his sour mood beginning to lift. Nelson would love hearing about his date. He slowly shook his head until the corners of his lips rose and he began to laugh.



From *The Dos Passos Review*

Millie's Place

Barbara Eknoian

If anyone had a hard luck story, they could find a room at Millie's boarding house. Ever since she heard the Salvation Army Band play at Journal Square when she was about 13, Millie had been intrigued by their "good works." About the same time, she had gone to the movies and had seen Jean Simmons starring in *Guys and Dolls*. Jean looked so lovely in her Salvation Army bonnet. Millie fantasized she would grow up and hand out Bible tracts on street corners. She would serve soup to the down-and-outers.

Instead of doing so, she accepted Andy Taborini's proposal when she was 18. Her father had encouraged her to marry him; he thought there might not be another opportunity. He had pointed to the fact that her cousin Rose had been real fussy, and she was still an old maid. That was *way* before women's lib.

Although Andy had been a decent husband, he hadn't had too much imagination when it came to fun. They never did anything during their married life that could be considered even remotely glamorous. A week at the Jersey Shore every year, that was about it. Maybe some fishing at Lake Hopatcong.

When he died unexpectedly at age fifty, he left Millie to fend for herself. Andy hadn't believed in insurance. Their house wasn't paid off, so Millie decided to take in boarders. Sometimes she had just enough to pay her expenses. Often boarders left owing her rent. She didn't mind too much, if she knew they really had experienced a hardship. She believed, in some small way, that she was helping mankind.

When she overheard Jack Thompson, a long-time boarder, telling someone she wasn't a great cook, she felt hurt. She asked him, "What do you want for \$150.00 a week for room and board, French cooking?"

She noticed Jack's face redden and was surprised that he looked embarrassed to have been overheard. He hunched his shoulders and drew his neck down, looking like a turtle alert for danger, adding quickly, "You know you'll never miss a meal here, and the linens are changed once a week. She's a great little housekeeper." These words seemed to soften the hurtful remark for Millie.

She insisted her turn-of-the-century house be Dutch-boy clean. It stood out from other houses on the block: some hadn't been painted in years. Jack had recently painted the shutters emerald green, her flower-boxes daffodil yellow. People always commented favorably about her home.

Friday evenings were always hectic at Millie's. The boarders looked forward eagerly to their weekends. Rita, a 30-year-old divorcée, always chatting non-stop, babbled on about her date that evening. Since the kitchen had the best light, she placed her magnifying mirror on the kitchen table so that she could apply her makeup. She knew not to tie up the bathroom as the male boarders would usually complain that she was taking too long in there. She asked, "So Millie, what are you doing tonight?"

"Oh, I'll probably just stay home and read. Haven't had much free time lately.

Just look at the books from my book club piling up on my desk."

"Why don't you go to bingo or go dancing? You're still young enough to get another man."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Millie said, continuing to sponge off the white ceramic tile on the counter. "One man is quite enough. If the good Lord gives you one good man in a lifetime, be thankful."

"Well, he didn't give me one yet," Rita said. She closed one eye and smudged heavy black liner on her lid. "I'm going to keep looking until I make a good catch, and he won't be a guppy either," she laughed. Then she stood up and pointed down at the black knit dress she was wearing. "Is this too short?"

"If you want my opinion, it sure is," Millie said as she turned off the overhead light at the kitchen sink.

Rita did a slow twirl in the middle of the kitchen and pointed her toe towards Millie. "George down at the factory told me I've got the most beautiful legs he's ever seen." She wiggled to adjust her sheer black panty hose.

Millie looked at Rita's tight-fitting mini dress and shook her head disapprovingly. She said, "I hope you gave him a compliment right back."

"Compliment George? Why should I?" Rita looked puzzled.

"Because of the Evil Eye. If someone gives you a compliment, it means they probably envy something about you. It brings bad luck."

"But George is a man. I know a female might envy me. I'm sure George has something else in mind."

"Hmm, you're probably right on that account," Millie said. "Just remember, when someone compliments you, compliment them right back. It reverses the curse."

"What curse?" Rita looked concerned.

When a subject excited Millie, she talked with her hands, and now they were in full swing. It was her Italian heritage. Pointing her index finger at Rita, she said, "You see, I know from experience because my family used to tell me about this. I thought it was just superstition. Then as I got older, I got wiser." She sat back in her chair and folded her arms. "I started to notice things. For instance, my cousin Eddie always got compliments on his curly red hair. Today, he's bald."

Then she leaned forward toward Rita as though telling her something confidential.

"You know my friend, Ida? She bragged about her dress size, a 5. Now she shops at the Large Size Mart. And I remember when Esther Stevenson beat out Joanne Taylor for best smile in our yearbook. I ran into Esther at the dentist's office, and guess what?"

"She's got false teeth," Rita laughed.

"Exactly." Millie looked pleased with Rita for the first time that evening. As she walked out to sit on the front porch, she turned around again, saying, "Just remember: always return a compliment."

If the weather wasn't too chilly, Millie usually read the newspaper out on the wide wrap-around porch that circled the front of the house, extending to the sides. She and Andy had bought the house for that very reason.

She looked up from her paper, and her glasses almost slid off her small nose. Jonathan, a favorite boarder, was whistling as he came up the walk.

"Hi," he said. "Sorry I'm late. Are there leftovers I could warm up?" He sat on the steps next to her rocker. Jonathan was always even-tempered and pleasant, whether he worked overtime or not.

"Of course. There's ham, sweet potatoes, and fresh coffee. Just put your plates in the dishwasher when you're done."

"Will do, no problem," he said, hurrying into the house.

The lamplights cast shadows on her walkway, and she realized it was too dark to continue reading her paper. She got up to go inside but saw Jack pushing a supermarket basket down the block toward her house. She said under her breath, "Here comes trouble."

"Good evening, Ma'am," Jack said swinging his cart to the side of the house. He addressed her as "Ma'am" to tease her. They were about the same age. It seemed to Millie that he liked to make her feel she was his senior.

"Stop right there, Jack." Millie attempted to sound stern. "I thought I told you I didn't want those darn bottles, and who knows what else, in my back yard!"

"Geez, Millie, I can get a good price for this stuff. I can pay you what I owe sooner." He grinned at her. "Recycling is the craze. We could join the Sierra Club together."

"Sierra Club?" She raised one eyebrow. "Leave me out of your schemes, Jack. No more junk. It might bring bugs." Standing there with her hands on her hips, she maintained a serious look. "Besides, you could get a fine." He hurried toward the backyard to stash his stuff.

Shaking her head in disbelief, she thought, *I'm the landlady. I hate to be a nag, but he doesn't listen.* She felt too tired to have any further discussion with him. It was like talking to a gray-haired teenager. She went inside to have some coffee.

Jonathan scanned his newspaper while talking about his latest project down at Perris Community College. He was the supervisor of the grounds. "Hey, there's a sale at the Garden Center." He leaned towards Millie to share the paper with her. "We could get some azaleas and bedding plants."

This comment reminded Millie that just that morning she had thrown away one of her African violets. It made her feel sad to remember it blossoming beautifully last month, but then to see all the leaves wilted today. She wondered if she had over-watered the violet. Whenever she lost a plant, she felt a pang of regret. Somehow, it made her think of the time she lost her baby. He had been born prematurely with beautiful dark hair and tiny, tiny fingers and toes. He only lived for one day. She was in deep thought: *Maybe, he would have been as outgoing as Jonathan. They had been born the same year.*

Jonathan interrupted her reverie. "How about some coral and white bushes?"

"Why, that's so nice of you. I'll pay you for your time. I don't want to take advantage of my boarders."

"No problem. You know I like flowers too." He carried his plate to the dishwasher and went upstairs to take a shower.

She felt so fortunate to have Jonathan for a boarder. He was hard-working and level-headed. She knew he'd make some girl a great husband.

Then Jack moseyed into the kitchen, and Millie's posture stiffened. She said, "Look here, I just cleaned the kitchen. I'm going upstairs to read. You can make yourself a sandwich, and don't forget to rinse off your plate and put it in the washer."

As she headed for the staircase, Jack yelled, "Discrimination! Right here at Millie's."

"What are you talking about?"

"Looks like Jonathan ate a hot meal. I get a sandwich, and I can still smell those sweet potatoes."

She didn't know why she often over-reacted to his teasing remarks. It seemed to Millie that he was always looking for a sparring partner. She wanted to ignore him but added, "At least Jonathan cleans up his mess." She hurried up the stairs so he wouldn't have the last word.

The next morning was Saturday, and she finished her chores right away. She dressed in slacks and wore her navy woolen jacket. It was a little nippy for spring. She still had a youthful figure, but she hid it by wearing loose-fitting clothing. Her dark brown hair was sprinkled with gray, but she still looked younger than sixty. Rita constantly coaxed her to color it. Millie always resisted. As she got ready to tie a scarf over her head she thought, *Maybe, I will try one of those rinses. I've always liked auburn.*



Photo by
Stephanie Ast

She was a very private person who never told anyone where she was going. She ran to the corner and caught the bus to go to the square to see a matinée. The movies had held a special place in her heart since she was a little girl. She did not want to go to one of the newer complexes where twelve movies were featured at one time. She preferred to sit in the huge luxurious movie palace downtown; she admired its Renaissance architecture. When the lavish wine-red draperies glided open, and the feature began, she was a child again. The Stanley Theater was her favorite. She would look up at the ceiling, which seemed like a midnight black sky studded with diamond-like stars. She thought people didn't know what they were missing by sitting in the modern alley-like theaters.

On the bus ride to the theater, she reminisced about going to Saturday matinées with her mother. She guessed she must have been about four or five years old when they watched the extravagant musicals. She was in awe of the big screen. Everyone happily danced down sidewalks. People sang to each other instead of talking. *What a wonderful place to be*, she used to think. In her young

mind, she believed she could walk down the aisle, climb the steps to the stage, and step into that happy place. Sometimes, she would say to herself, "One, two, three. Go." But she never did. She'd think, *maybe next time I'll do it*.

As she entered the darkened theater, she decided to sit near a young family. She had had two bad experiences when she was a young girl, when some pervert had sat next to her. She had gotten up and run home.

Another time, she had the nerve to tell the usher at the candy counter that some man kept following her and her friend, Mary. Whenever they changed seats, he did too. No Siree, she did not want to sit alone in the row.

Millie sometimes spoke out loud, murmuring little comments: "My, my, would you look at that. Why, I'll be." She'd forget she was there alone, and she missed having Andy with her. She always brought plenty of tissues in case of a real tear-jerker.

On this particular Saturday, she walked out as the credits rolled down the screen, and her eyes adjusted to the sunlight. The movie had a vague ending, and she wondered whether the couple would wind up together. When she was a kid, if she had not understood the film, she coaxed her mom to explain the story. Her mother would edit the story so that Millie could have a happy ending.

Right after serving an early supper on Sunday, Millie got ready to go out. She put on a tailored navy dress with matching heels and purse and chose pearl earrings to wear.

Jack noticed she was all dressed up, and he teased, "Going to meet somebody downtown, Mildred?"

She just ignored him, wondering if he had started drinking again. He was a recovering alcoholic. He usually attended AA meetings on Sunday. She hoped he hadn't slipped, though there was no evidence in the house that he might have. Jack had settled in the city after retiring from the Navy. He had never married, but according to his tales, he'd had many, many girlfriends. He said he'd gotten drunk once in Honolulu and almost married an islander, but his buddies rescued him and carried him back to the ship. Millie thought that things had gone the other way around. They had rescued the girl, not Jack. That was the closest he had ever come to commitment.

Because he was always annoying to her, Millie couldn't admit to herself that she found him attractive. He was tall, and he always bragged that he could still fit into his uniform. She quickly brushed such thoughts aside, hoping she wouldn't be late for the service.

Although she was Catholic, she went every Sunday evening to the Pentecostal Church. Mostly, she enjoyed the music, hand-clapping, and foot-stomping when the congregation was moved by the Spirit. For some reason, the music stirred her spiritually. She felt closer to God at that little Pentecostal Church. It was none of anyone's business that she went there every week. She just kept it to

herself.

Rita burst into the dining room. She stuck out her hand and flashed a pear-shaped diamond. "George has finally proposed." She circled the dining room table showing off her ring.

Jack jumped up and gave her a hug, and so did Jonathan. Millie put the coffee pot down and kissed her on the cheek.

She could see that Rita was ecstatic.

"This time it's for keeps," Rita said, crossing her heart.

Since Rita's family had retired to Florida, Millie thought she should have a little party to celebrate the engagement. She decided to browse through some *Family Circle* magazines to get ideas for a party buffet.

As she clipped out a recipe, Jack came out and sat on the step next to the rocker, Jonathan's usual seat. She thought to herself, *Now, I wonder what he wants. Maybe he needs to borrow a few dollars.* She argued in her own mind whether or not she would lend him some money.

He turned to look at her directly and said, "How would you like to go to the movies?"

She was dumbfounded. *Movies with Jack? Why, it was unheard of.* She felt so embarrassed and could not understand why he had asked her. He had exhibited strange behavior before, but this unexpected offer topped it all.

She did not want to be rude because he looked totally sincere. Then she thought, *He's probably setting me up for a joke. Is it April Fools?* She actually stuttered, saying, "I...I...I'm too busy to go to the movies, Jack." She waited for some teasing comment. There was none.

"I know you go to the movies every Saturday," Jack said. "Why not go with me?"

"How do you know that?"

"I know you go to the Holy Spirit Pentecostal Church on Sunday nights, too." He looked sheepish. "I was worried about you heading downtown all by yourself, so I followed you one night. I slipped into a back pew of the church. You didn't notice. To tell you the truth, I enjoyed the service. And when I looked your way, you were standing there clapping and smiling. You looked ten years younger. I don't know why. Since then, I've been meaning to ask you to the movies." He looked shy after saying all this. Millie tried to hide her surprise. She felt like a blushing high school senior finally asked to the prom, and she was flustered.

She heard an inner voice say, "One, two, three. Go."

Then, Millie said. "I don't like those modern theaters, Jack. If you'll take me to the Stanley downtown, I'll go."



In Praise of the Fool

Starr Goode

One languid Sunday afternoon, as I lay on my bed, I felt, via the electro-magnetism of the radio waves, the voice of Nina Simone wash through me and fill the room with yearning:

*I wish I knew how it would feel to be free,
I wish I could break all the chains holding me.*

I wanted to feel free, too! Decades ago, back in Berkeley, amidst the study of many things that were part of the spirit of those heady times, I developed a passion for a system of symbols known as the Tarot. The cards begin not with the number one, but with a zero above an image titled “The Fool.” How strange, I thought, to begin before the beginning. In Western Mystery Schools, the tarot cards are studied in sequence to gain insight about the journey of human consciousness. The quality of mind necessary to move from intention to completion in any cycle of manifestation is shown in the image of the Fool. And just what quintessential quality does the Fool represent? It is a sense of freedom.

Tarot cards have an ancient yet obscure origin; some claim an Egyptian origin, and others say mystics met to create the cards in the city of Fez, which came to prominence sometime after the burning of the Great Library of Alexandria. We do know that they first appear in Europe in the latter 14th century as playing cards. The story enacted in the cards starts with the image of an androgynous youth poised on the edge of a mountain cliff and dressed in the colorful motley of a fool, as in folk and court traditions. With a serene expression of equanimity, he gazes upward at a distant height and seems unconcerned that he is about to fall off a cliff. To say the least, he is about to experience something new!

Things are not what they seem. Here, on an isolated mountaintop, a place usually reserved for the sage, we find instead a fool on the threshold of possibility, about to incarnate into a new adventure from the spiritual heights down into the valley of the material world. The card implies that when starting something new, it is wise to be a fool. With a willingness to go forth, he knows nothing but has faith in his own powers of being. Furthermore, the card is assigned the number zero as a point of origin. The Fool is no negative cipher, but possesses all the richness of zero, the freedom from limitations.

Almost endless are the associations that can be attributed to the image of the Fool. Like many enduring symbols, it has an open-ended quality that accrues new meanings over time. In many spiritual traditions, before the beginning of time, before the Fool can fall into the world, the breath of the spirit must exhale a world into being. So, it seems to me that the tarot series begins with that foundational metaphor: the breath is the spirit, for the Fool represents

that animating energy, which gives life. The English word *spirit* comes from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning breath, breath of a god (inspiration!), from *spirare*, to breathe. Numerous other examples exist. The Greek *pneuma* is the vital spirit, soul, or creative force of a person, literally, “that which is breathed or blown.” In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word *prana* means the breath of life, the breath of the universe. In Hebrew and Arabic, the *Ruh* is the name for the vital principle of spirit as breath. The *chi* (or *qi* or *ki*), thought of in Chinese medicine as the life force whose movement through the body is the basis of health, has its root in the Mandarin word *qi*, literally, “air, breath.”

How exactly does the tarot Fool fit into all of this? Besides being numbered zero—that is, existing before the beginning as only a spirit could do—the concept of zero also connects the Fool with breath of wind. Zero derives from the Italian *zefiro*, from Medieval Latin *zephirum* or *zephyr*, the light, pleasant west wind, almost nothing. And the source of all of this is the Arabic *sift* or *zero*, both meaning cipher, which was a translation of the Sanskrit *sunya*, meaning emptiness or the void. From this void, all creation arises and returns—the nothing behind existence, yet which mystics claim to be “manifested in everything.” Thus, nothing gets a symbol—not the round “O,” but the oval-shaped “0.” As Theseus says in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the human imagination gives “to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name.” In the tarot, the summation of the Fool’s adventure is found in the concluding card, named “The World.” Here, the life force is imaged as the Cosmic Dancer, dancing on the airy nothing of the winds up in the blue vault of the heavens. In the wisdom that the cards have to teach us, She inhabits, as if in a cartouche, the middle of a green wreath woven into the shape of zero. Freely dancing on air, She is balanced at the center of zero.

And in the magic of words, further study shows that the origin of the word “fool” is from the Old French, *fol*, “fool, foolish,” from Latin *follicis*, “bellows,” and, by extension, a windbag, an “empty-headed person.” A bellows blows air to ignite a fire and has sides that allow it to expand and contract, like a human being who takes in a breath to fire the body with oxygen and then exhales. Thus, the etymology of the word “fool” connects it to the medieval fool whose “empty-headed” jests give him the freedom to enliven the royal court, and it also connects the Fool to the motif of spirit as the breath of life.

I was there on the day my god(dess)daughters were born. From my place in the hospital corridor, I waited. Beyond the wall, inside a room, their mother was giving birth. Suddenly, the sound of one cry, and then another, astonished me. Nothing could have announced their presence in this world to me more effectively than those first loud exhalations of breath. Each cry built an unbreakable bond between us. They had begun their Fool’s journey a moment before with their first intake of breath. Much has been said about the rhythm of human breath. Meditation masters teach that attention to the movement of our breath is one of the grandest tools we have for coming into the present and for restoring us to who we really are, taking us back, they say, to some spark of ourselves before all the layers of socialization strangled us; back, they say, to the freedom to be ourselves.

The Fool shows us the way. Even if we cannot reach his standard, we carry his essence inside ourselves as we move through the adventure of being alive. Buoyant, young at heart, creative, the part of us that still feels free and enjoys life—the very opposite of Sinclair Lewis’s character Babbitt, who reveals at the end of the novel, “I’ve never done a single thing I wanted to do in my whole life.” Or the kind of work Thoreau describes, which gives a person “no time to be anything but a machine.” Far from the stoic endurance of grim duty or the view of life as a dreary series of lessons to be learned is the lightness of spirit that is the Fool.

By Shakespeare’s time in the late 16th century, “fool” could be a job description. One could be the official Fool and be paid for it. What an era! Noble households employed fools for the pleasure of their company. Wit was a commodity. It is said that Henry VIII’s fool, Will Sommers, rarely left the king’s side. Artist Hans Holbein included a portrait of him as part of the court life. The verbal ingenuity of these learned, or “artificial,” fools gave them a privileged tongue to tell the truth but tell it at a slant through riddles, song, and rhyme. Set apart by their special costumes made of motley cloth (it being illegal for an ordinary person to impersonate a fool), these court jesters, with their delight in folly, had a rare freedom to be themselves and still keep their heads. They stand with one foot outside the social order, but, by evoking laughter, fools can make moral commentary on the life they see about them. Through his folly, the Fool exposes folly in others. A second category of fools also existed in wealthy households: the “naturals” or idiot-fools, who were mentally handicapped but revered for their merry antics and moments of innocent wisdom. There was a rare meritocracy in the profession, because anyone could be a fool, even women or those from the lower classes. All one needed was ability. Thus, the Fool moves from archetype to physical embodiment in the domestic fool-for-hire.

Of course, the history of professional fools stretches back thousands of years. There are records of fools in the courts of Egypt as early as 2,200 BCE and in places as far-ranging as the temple of the Aztec king Montezuma to classical Rome, where the Emperor Augustus had a fool named Galba. A recent book, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*, demonstrates the seemingly universal need for the Fool and his humanizing influence on cultures independent of each other. The book tells the stories of numerous fools: Birbal, the Court Jester to the Indian Mogul emperor Akbar; Abu Dulawa, the Arab jester poet; and the Chinese jester Shi, who, during the reign of King Huiwang (7th century BCE), gave the perfect fool’s cover for verbal license: “I am a jester, my words can give no offense.”

During the Middle Ages in England, we find the Fool as a rustic clown or buffoon in burlesque folk festivals such as the Feast of Fools, celebrated around New Year’s Day. Often held in churches and later in the streets, this sanctioned merry-making and drunken partying temporarily disrupted the usual social hierarchy. In a reversal of power, the lower could command the higher. During this ritualized overthrow of order, an elected Lord of Misrule, a kind of Holy Fool, often a peasant, oversaw the Christmas and New Year’s festivities. This once-a-year release of steam and social resentments had a forebear in the wild revelries of the Roman Saturnalia, in which slaves and masters switched places.

In one way or another, these festivals marked the winter solstice and a return of the growing light: the rebirth of the sun.

Just as laughter erupts from a reversal of expectations, part of the mystique of the Fool exists in surprises and reversals, as summed up in the phrase, “the wisdom of the fool.” As poet William Blake advises in the spirited “Proverbs of Hell,” “If the fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise.”

Alas, the custom of the court fool comes to an end by the 18th century. Dicky Pierce, the earl of Suffolk’s fool, the last known household fool, died in 1728.

An epitaph by Jonathan Swift is engraved on his tombstone.

The Age of Reason, with the oppressive sway of rationality, seemed to grant no room for a fool. But despite shifting customs, the traditions of millennia do not die easily. Nothing as deep in the human psyche as the energies of the Fool can be wiped out completely. Witness our still-celebrated April Fool’s Day, the movies of Jerry Lewis, Ernest (*Scared Stupid*), Jack Black, or my favorite TV character as a child, the lovable beatnik, Maynard G. Krebs, who also stands outside the social order

as he speaks his truth with the classic fool’s caveat, “No offense, good buddy.” Many Americans get the nation’s news from late-night TV comedian/fools like Dave or Jay or Jon. And there is that wise, learned fool, the Great Gorino, Gore Vidal, who wants to wake up the citizens through his ironic commentary: “We have an empire, but none of our students can find it on a map.” These are only a few of the fools who continue to guide and shape society.

Still, no one has immortalized the role of the fool more than Shakespeare. His plays display, as nothing else does, the fool in action: companion, trickster, exposor of folly. Most memorable is that great trio of fools, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, and the Fool in *King Lear*. The addition of gifted comic Robert Armin to the troupe may have inspired the Bard to create these roles. (Armin later penned his own book, *Foole Upon Foole*.) Shakespeare turns away from the old stage tradition of the rustic clown to introduce the court fool as a new character. Thus, Armin dons the costume of the professional fool, a coat of motley. In the eccentric book,

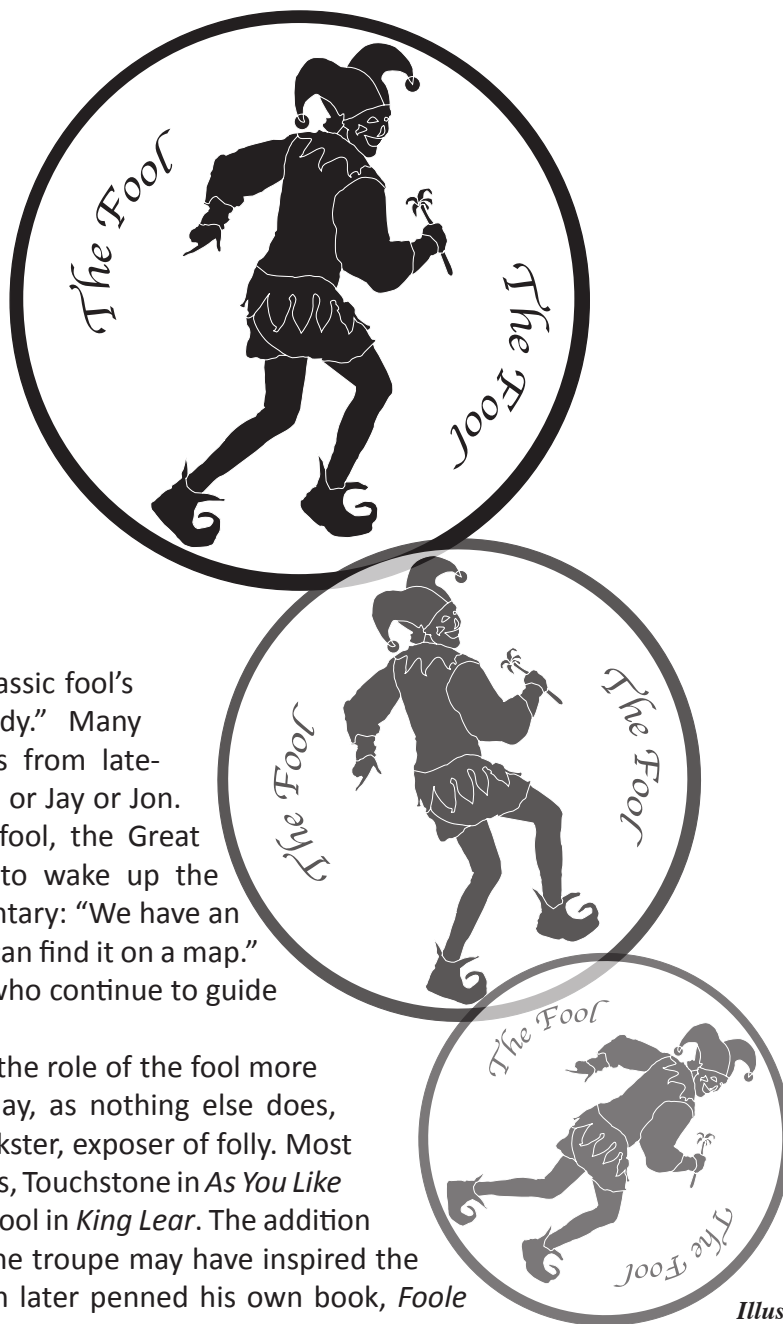


Illustration
by SWOSU
Design
Studio

Shakespeare's Motley, Englishman Leslie Hobson devotes 300 pages to what the word "motley" might mean. (Such is the devotion that Shakespeare excites!) Hobson proves how the plays break new ground by shifting from the buffoon's russet jerkin to the fool's long coat of motley.

Certainly, Shakespeare's explorations of the Fool, along with an obvious affinity for the character, represent the Fool's highest moments, his literary apotheosis. In 1599, the witty Fool Touchstone (played by Armin) first appears on the stage in *As You Like It* as a duplicitous trickster, seducer of shepherdesses, and, in part, still the clown. After meeting Touchstone in the forest of Arden, the melancholy Jacques envies the Fool his freedom: "Invest me in my motley; give me leave / To speak my mind." Another example, the splendid Feste, licensed fool to the household of Lady Olivia, finds himself in the center of the whirling atmosphere created by the mad revels of *Twelfth Night*, named for a holiday also known as the "Feast of the Epiphany," which falls 12 nights after Christmas. A fool might feel right at home in such an ambiance, as this is another New Year's celebration like the Feast of Fools or Saturnalia. Critic Harold Bloom observes, "The genius of *Twelfth Night* is Feste, the most charming of all Shakespeare's fools and the only sane character in a wild play." After a fast-paced exchange with Feste, Viola remarks, "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool; / And to do that well craves a kind of wit." Feste, alone on the stage, closes the play with a song reflecting life's uncertainties. The jester also knows the other side: "For the rain it raineth every day."

Finally, we come to the incomparable Fool of Lear, a childlike "natural" fool known for his affections of the heart. He pines away for Cordelia, loves Lear, and "labors to outjest...", as a gentleman puts it to Kent out on the heath. Or perhaps, as Bloom believes, the Fool torments the king into insanity as punishment for his moral lapses as a father: "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise." Once Lear has collapsed into this state of madness (becoming his own fool?), the Fool disappears into the ether, or back to whatever world he came from. I think sometimes the Fool just couldn't take Lear anymore; he'd had it with the king's lethal personality.

If the essence of the Fool is his freedom of wit, the two strongest mentalities of Shakespeare's characters belong to Hamlet and Falstaff. From that most intelligent of writers, his most intelligent characters. Both play the Fool. Hamlet acts the Fool when he puts on an "antic disposition" to feign madness as a cover for his designs of revenge and murder. The second scene of the second act, the conversations with Polonius's spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, displays gems of wit and philosophic depth to the reader and dazzle of words, mocking puns, and metaphoric leaps. The young prince takes on the persona of a natural fool with a diseased mind but with the soaring wit of the artificial fool: "I am but mad north-northwest. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a

handsaw.”

One New Year’s Eve, with the thought of doing myself some good, I forced myself to sit through a screening of *The Secret*, which touted itself as containing the occult wisdom of the ages known only to a few. What great secret is revealed? That our thoughts make our reality. This is new? Hamlet said some 400 years ago, “For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

Hamlet ponders throughout the play the brevity of life, the nature of human beings, “this quintessence of dust,” never moreso than in that graveyard, where he famously holds in his hand the skull of the king’s jester:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft.—Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?

Here we see a detailed portrait of the King’s fool integrated in the family life of a noble household—the jokes, the kisses, the entertaining conviviality, the warmth. Indeed, does Hamlet speak of any other character with such affection?

Often, in both Henry IV plays, Falstaff is called a fool and almost always acts the Fool, as he is the embodiment of wit. When Sir John vows to “live cleanly as a nobleman should do,” we know that this pledge echoes St. Augustine’s prayer: “Oh God make me good ... but not yet.” For the very next time we see him, much to our delight (for who wants a reformed Falstaff?), he is fully himself. Walking down a London street, having just ordered on credit a satin cloak and breeches for himself, Falstaff muses on his powers of invention: “I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.” He then encounters the Lord Chief Justice, highest law official in the land, who implicates him in the midnight robbery at Gadshill and threatens to put him in the stocks. Far from cowed, the fat knight hits him up for a thousand pounds. When the justice accuses him of being an old burnout, Falstaff claims to be young, having just been born this very day at three in the afternoon. The spirit of the Fool, devoted to play in any circumstance, is ever young, ever being born again.

Falstaff lives. One of his greatest contributions to the plays is to stop the juggernaut of war, if just for a moment. In the thick of battle, Prince Henry, hot for revenge, calls upon Falstaff to lend him a weapon; the old man pulls from the holster not a pistol, but a bottle of wine. Hal hurls it back at the knight: “What! Is’t a time to jest and dally now?” Here Falstaff asserts his formidable personality. What better time to play the jester than in the face of danger? The violence that follows from the prince’s concept of honor, the “grinning honor” of the dead, has no sway over him. Falstaff wants to live. One may recall another condemning speech about heroics, uttered by the most famous warrior

whoever chose to die for glory: Achilles. The voice of Achilles resounds from hell: "I'd rather slave on Earth for another man—some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive—than rule down here over all the breathless dead."

One can never hope to understand all the mysteries of the many-sided Fool. Nor does this goal even seem desirable. The archetype of the Fool lives as an instinctual energy inside us. And yet, to me, it seems hardly real that living, breathing men and women were once hired to be fools, to be treasured as a necessary part of culture. Though I carry my Fool inside me, sometimes I can't help but wish he were out walking beside me in all his colorful garb. In my life, I have suffered from anxiety and have yearned for freedom. I am not alone in having moods vacillating between despair and happiness. But, whether my spirit feels heavy or light, I want my Fool present to give perspective on either extreme. Psychologist Carl Jung advises, "Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of.... The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it modern dress."



Cashmere Sweater: A History

by Daniel Schwarz

Frayed cuffs,
tattered wool,
nibbled by moths,
disheveled memories
that won't be left behind;
faded tints, buttons loose,
rips at tired seams,
elbows poking through sites
worn by life's use.

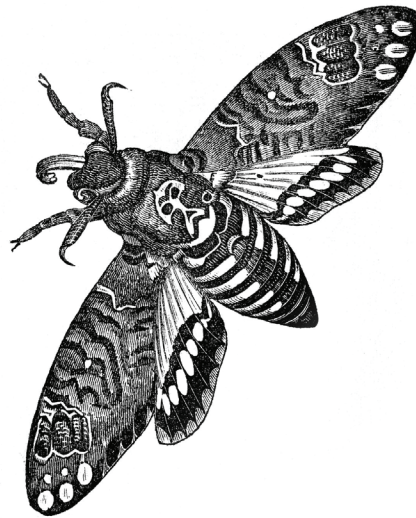


Photo courtesy The Graphics Fairy

May Day

Dennis Vannatta

We descended on Branson like two wild men from the hills, unshaven, unwashed, wearing the clothes we'd slept in, talking too loud and laughing too much, on the lookout for loose women and willing to fight for them. It was all an act, of course, and fooled no one, least of all ourselves. Curtis is from Milwaukee originally and, despite living in the Ozarks for close to forty years now, still speaks with that Wisconsin cheese-eater accent. I've been living in Little Rock nearly that long. Once, I think, Little Rock was probably an elegant little city hugging the hills above the Arkansas River, but now it's just another place where too many people live and everyone drives either a big pickup without a scratch on it or an SUV with a "Baby on Board" sign in the window. We meet once a year at Curtis's place in the Ozarks to raise hell and reminisce. We've been calling it our "*Brokeback Mountain* weekend" ever since that movie came out, but that's just another of our jokes. No, those hooks go deeper than gay love: we were in the war together.

I'm talking about Vietnam. There was a time when, if you mentioned "the war," everybody just automatically knew you were talking about Vietnam unless you were an old fart, and then you might be talking about World War II or Korea. But those days are long gone, and now I guess Curtis and I are a couple of those old farts, and the country has gone on to other wars. I don't even recognize the uniforms any more.

But enough about that. I mean it. Enough.

I'd taken off work at noon Thursday and made it to his place by dinner time. Curtis cooked up some burgers and fried potatoes for us, and then we drank beer and talked about the good ol' days that never were until we fell asleep where we sat, me in the La-Z-Boy and Curtis on the floor, his back up against the couch; and we woke up the next morning skuzzy and hung over, had a little hair of the dog, and talked some more about the war. At some point, the sun went down, Curtis said, "I'm so ho'ny, I'm so ho'ny," and we headed into Branson to raise some old-codger hell.

We ended up in Grumpy's Tavern in downtown Branson. We didn't have any trouble finding a table even though it was a Friday night with enough tourists in town to make the state of Missouri list to the southwest. But they mostly stay over on 76, the Music Highway, and leave downtown to the locals.

I ordered a Diet Coke because I wasn't up to another beer just yet, and Curtis ordered a Bud long neck.

"Make sure it's a long neck."

I rolled my eyes. His long-neck beer is another of our rituals. We have our rituals, our roles, and we memorized the script long ago. He'll hold the beer with his bad hand and look around the room until he catches someone glancing his way by accident, and then he'll scowl and say, "What are you looking at?" It's

like the scene in *Lonely Are the Brave* when Kirk Douglas has to fight the one-armed man who throws long-neck beer bottles. Douglas chokes the man with his empty shirt-sleeve. In our version, Curtis plays the one-armed man. All for a joke. I keep telling him that one of these years some redneck is going to take him up on it and stomp his ass, and Curtis always says, "Why do you think I sit next to the exit?" I think the last time I found it funny was about 1980, but that doesn't stop Curtis. Rituals are at their most powerful, after all, once they've lost any practical reason for being.

The bad right hand that Curtis insists on grasping the long-neck with is missing the pinky and ring fingers, blown off in Vietnam. I don't know exactly how it happened and never asked, although I always had the feeling Curtis would be more than happy to tell the tale. He sure as hell talks about everything else from Nam. But the first time I met him, I didn't ask for details, and he didn't volunteer any, so that's the way we left it.

We were both clerk typists in the big army supply depot at Cam Rahn Bay. We didn't have a damn thing in common. Curtis had barely made it through high school, while I'd had a few semesters of college and was three years older than him, from Oklahoma to his Wisconsin, and I'd been a clerk my whole tour in country while he was a combat infantryman until he lost his fingers someplace near Dalat. Anyone else would have taken his million-dollar wound back to the world, but Curtis stayed in, even fought the DOD bureaucracy to stay in. I still just shake my head. But we'd been drafted on the same date and had the same DEROS, May 1st, and somehow that coincidence trumped all the differences.

He lived in the headquarters company barracks but spent half his time at my hooch. I think it had less to do with me than with Annie, my Vietnamese hooch honey, a sweet sweet seventeen-year-old who cooked and cleaned and kept my horns well trimmed. I think he had a crush on her. I wasn't any better. Hell, I didn't know anything about women. I thought I was in love with her. I wanted to marry her and take her back home with me, and I told her so. Then one week to the day before I was supposed to rotate back to the world, she moved out on me and moved in with an FNG. Insert tearful scene here. Callow young American soldier begs world-weary Asian chick for explanation. "Can't eat promise," was all she said. Like she read it off a fortune cookie. Well, it was a lesson learned: what you can expect from a woman. I never forgot it, I can tell you that.

Anyway, that whore's betrayal gave me one more good reason to be glad to get out of Nam, but I think the only reason Curtis didn't sign up for another tour was that I threatened to cut off his other fingers if he did and promised we'd still be buddies, still see each other regularly once we got out of the army.

We both had six months left to serve after getting back to the States. Curtis did his at Fort Campbell, while I got stuck at Fort Sill, dregs of the universe, even if it is in Oklahoma. We talked on the phone at least once a week, Curtis always reminding me of my promise to see him after we got out, "Or I'll have my ass back in Nam faster than you can bat your baby blues."

And close to forty years later, here we were, Grumpy's Tavern, Branson, Missouri, Friday night, April 30, May Day eve, a day you'd think would be a cause for celebration.

But for Curtis? I don't know. I just don't know.

Turns out he never could catch anybody's eye when he had his claw curled around the neck of his beer bottle. So he grunted a sort of general, "What are you staring at?" as he waved the bottle around, and he still didn't get a bite. Come on. The guy's in his late fifties. You can try something like that when you're in your twenties or thirties, maybe, but fifties? It's a joke, all right, but not the kind you laugh at. Besides, those weren't even Vietnam vets in *Lonely Are the Brave*.

Since I'm going down that empty-ritual road, might as well add another stop on the line: the hunting wild women thing. I've had more women in my life than I care to think about—hell, about half of them I've been married to—and I'm usually looking for a break from them on my weekend in Branson, so it's always Curtis we're trying to "hook up" with someone, as they say now. "We need to find you a woman, Curtis," I'll say, and he'll say, "Damn straight!" And after enough beer, we'll head out to attempt that very thing.

We've never had any luck. For the longest time, I thought I was the Jonah, but Curtis had no tales to tell about scoring when I wasn't there, so apparently it wasn't just me. I even went through a period of half-wondering if that *Brokeback Mountain* thing wasn't too far off after all, but I don't think so. Curtis never put any moves on me, anyway. No, I think the explanation is simpler: Curtis is just too damn shy. He was just a kid out of high school when he got drafted, and he'd never had any experience in the romance line except for worshipping from afar like boys do until they find out that women don't fly with the angels but are lying, conniving sacks of guts just like men only with a few variations on the basic equipment. Trust me on that one. The only girl Curtis ever talked about was this girl Carol something who moved in across the street from him when he was a junior in high school. Luckiest thing that ever happened to him, he told me. He liked to peek through the curtains of his living room at her as she practiced baton-twirling on her front lawn. Did he ever talk to her? Hell, no. He had a photograph of her, though, that he kept in his wallet and showed to me once when we were even drunker than usual. Yeah, it's coming back to me. We were up on the roof of the headquarters company barracks sitting on lawn chairs and pounding that Bud, and off in the distance you could see the flash of artillery and mortar fire and hear the soft, almost-pleasant "whomp whomp." It was the closest I ever got to combat. Anyway, that's when he hauled out the photo. He flicked his cigarette lighter so I could see better, but still it wasn't very clear. The photo was small, and the girl was tiny in the distance, in shorts and holding something shiny in her hand that I finally realized was a baton. There was some distortion or glare, too, not from the cigarette lighter but right in the photograph, and then it came to me: He'd taken the picture from his living room, through the front window. What a sad SOB.

Anyway, as far as I know, that was Curtis's sum total experience with women before he got drafted, and the army didn't help him any. In the army, the only women you have a shot at are whores and old lady thumb and her four daughters, and Curtis never went to any whores. Then he processed out at Fort Campbell, had a nervous breakdown before he got out of Kentucky, and spent several months in a V.A. hospital. What happened? I don't know, but he hadn't seemed all that nervous in Nam. I drove up to Kentucky twice to visit him at

the V.A. hospital, and I told the doc that he'd been all right in Nam and asked if there was any possibility that he could get back over there. But they nixed it. Curtis told me he'd be OK if he could come live with me, but I'm not as stupid as I look and told him I'd be happy to let him, but my fiancée wouldn't like it quite so much. Finally, they discharged him from the hospital on permanent disability, and he moved to a cabin in the Missouri Ozarks. Why there? Well, look at a map. It's one state up from Arkansas. As close to me as he dare get, I guess. He might have thought he needed me, but I knew what he really needed: to get laid.

There were four women in Grumpy's besides the waitresses, two at a table across the tavern from us, one sitting at the bar by herself, and a blond in her mid-twenties built like a brick pagoda and sitting at a table with three guys. So which one does Curtis choose as the lucky recipient of his affections? Of course, the young blond.

Curtis couldn't get over how hot she was. He was drooling in his beer. "Look at that! I'm sorry I didn't brush my teeth and change my socks."

"Yeah, you've got a real good chance with that one there."

"You never know. She may just be on the lookout for a man with experience."

"Well, why don't you go out and find one, and we'll see."

"She'll find everything she needs inside my drawers."

"Too bad you didn't change those while you were at it."

Etc.

That's the way these things went, with Curtis always on the verge of jumping some woman's bones but inevitably picking one he had no chance with, all just an excuse for us to crack back on one another, and I have to admit that in the right mood and with the right amount of beer, it can get pretty funny. I wasn't in that mood. I mean, come on. I'm sixty years old. Sixty. There was a woman back in Little Rock that I'd been seeing for awhile, and things were looking sweet. When I mentioned driving up to Branson for a weekend, she said, "Oh, good!" because she thought it was going to be me and her. When I explained the situation, she said she understood, she admired my loyalty to an old friend, blah-blah-blah. With every woman, you go through a phase early in the relationship, where things are fine, life is good, until finally it all goes to hell. We were in the good phase, but who knows what it would be when I got back from babysitting arrested-development Curtis?

Sometimes you just get tired.

Maybe Curtis did too and decided to jazz things up a bit, because his attentions to Blondie went beyond the talking and gawking stage. He had to turn halfway around in his chair to look at her, which he did, then caught her eye and winked. She just rolled her eyes and looked away. Then, when she looked back, Curtis waved at her, wagging the fingers on his five-finger hand.

I was about to tell him to cut it out before he made an even bigger fool out of himself when one of the men at the table—the biggest one, of course, and all three were bigger, stronger, younger, and looked a hell of a lot tougher than Curtis and me—said, "You got a problem over there, Pop?"

"No problem that this sweet young thang can't cure," Curtis said.

That's when I stood up and headed over to the juke box like I wanted to pick out some music to get your ass kicked by, then took a hard right and high-tailed

it out the door.

Out in the parking lot, I was standing by my car trying to figure out whether, if I dialed 911 on my cell phone, I get a Branson or a Little Rock operator. Suddenly, from around the side of the tavern here, comes Curtis moving as fast as he's able to in his condition. I guess his exit strategy came in handy for once.

"Start the car, jackass!" he hollered. I jumped in and started the car.

He collapsed on the front seat, panting and laughing. Then, as I gunned it out of there, he said, "Don't get off the boat! Don't get off the boat! Don't ever get off the boat!"

A line from *Apocalypse Now*, of course. The chef gets off the boat to hunt up some ingredients for a gourmet meal and runs head on into a tiger. "Don't get off the boat! Don't ever get off the boat!"

By this point in our lives, Vietnam popular culture is more vivid to us than the memory of Vietnam itself—or at least that's so for me. Curtis owns every movie made about Vietnam, every novel, every history, every memoir. Seems like it, anyway. There'll always be a movie on in the background while we're drinking beer. His purchase this time is *Hearts of Darkness*, not really about Nam but about Coppola's making of *Apocalypse Now*. It's close enough to a Nam movie, though, to earn a place in Curtis's collection. On each of my visits, we'll watch a new one or two and a couple of the old standbys. We can't carry on a conversation of more than four sentences without movie dialogue showing up. See a nice-looking girl? "Me so ho'ny, me so ho'ny." Walk into an especially seedy bar? "I got a bad feeling



Illustration by SWOSU Design Studio

about this one." And of course, appropriate for any occasion, "Charley don't surf!"

Curtis's cabin is a mini-museum of Vietnamiana, and he's an equal-opportunity collector. There's a Viet Cong flag on one wall of his bedroom and an American flag on the other. There's an M-16 hanging beside an AK -47 (purchased online, Curtis confessed). There's a pair of army jungle boots and a pair of rubber thongs that Curtis swears were taken off a dead dink, but they look like they could have been bought at Wal-Mart. The possibility that he bought them at Wal-Mart disturbs me more than the possibility that he took them off some poor slope he'd just wasted, because then he really would be a creepy piece of work. Which, let's face it, he is.

I mean, I had my Vietnam souvenirs, too, until one day I got back home from a visit with Curtis and found a big pile of ashes on my driveway. Turns out that was all that was left of my Vietnam souvenirs, my clothes, my books, my

personal papers, and my LPs. I guess Phyllis (wife number two) didn't want me to leave that particular weekend. Or maybe it was something else. I honestly don't remember. It'd take an Einstein to remember each and every one of our fights. I've hooked up with some crazy women in my life, but Phyllis was the only one who outright scared me. The divot in my right cheekbone is thanks to her. It happened when I was down under my car on a creeper, this was during that spell when I was trying to prove my manhood by changing my own oil, and all of a sudden, someone grabs me by the ankles and yanks me halfway across the driveway. Well, it was Phyllis with a ball-peen hammer, with which she proceeded to go upside my head. If it hadn't been for two garbage men who happened to be out front dumping trash running over to pull her off me, I'd be buried in some veterans' cemetery right now. A couple of times when Curtis would get in a conversation about Nam with some stranger and the subject would turn to his lost fingers, I'd say, "Hey, man, take a look at my face. I came closer to death in the battle of West Markham Street than this cowboy ever did in Tuyen Duc Province." I thought it was a pretty funny line, but Curtis didn't seem to appreciate the humor, so now I let him wave his disgusting hand and get all the glory.

It's all for Curtis. I don't get any pleasure out of it any more. How can a man go on building a whole life out of 365 days in a pesthole of a country that'd make Arkansas look like the pinnacle of civilization? I tell you, I get tired.

I think Curtis sensed it, too, because when I didn't laugh at his "Don't get off the boat" bit, he gave me a look and then said, "OK, Jerry, what's frosting your balls for you? You've been one cold son of a bitch the whole weekend."

"It hasn't been a whole weekend yet. I just got here yesterday."

"Hey, Jackass, you want to get technical on me, you should have gone to OCS."

Jesus Christ, could he not get one single sentence out without some army crap in it? But it was easier to lie than to fight, so I just told him that I couldn't seem to shake that hangover, and a sixty-year-old with a hangover isn't much fun to be around, and so on. I didn't know if he bought it, I didn't much care, but at least he dropped it. When we got back to the cabin, I said I was too damn tired for any more beer, went into the bedroom, flopped down, and turned out the light. I was tired, beat in every way, and my head did hurt. I lay there hoping that the bed wouldn't start spinning, and I was just about to go to sleep when I heard Jim Morrison singing, "This is the end..."

The little cheese-eater was watching *Apocalypse Now*.

When I woke up in the middle of the morning on Saturday, Curtis was gone. I shaved, showered, and tried to eat a little something. He still wasn't back, and I thought maybe he really was pissed at me and planned to stay away until I left. I was packing my AWOL bag when his Jeep pulled up outside.

I could tell right off he was in a good mood, like the cat that ate the canary. I didn't ask.

Let him come out with it in his own time.

"How's the head this morning, Jerry? Naw, save it. I know what your problem is, and it's not a hangover."

"OK, Carnac the Magnificent, tell me what it is."

"Your problem is you're bored. We've been doing the same stuff year after year. That's on me. My fault. You need a change of pace, and I'm the man to supply it. Here she be."

He pulled something out of his pocket. Tickets. He flicked them with his finger.

"Here you come all the way to the entertainment capital of the Western world, and you never see any of the sights. Well, tonight we change that. What you see here are two tickets to ... ta ta ta! ... the Baldknobbers!"

"The Baldknobbers."

"Best show in town. Laughs. Songs. Dancing girls. And let me tell you, trying to get two tickets for a Saturday night in May at this late date, hell, you don't know what I had to do to two guys down at the ticket office."

"That was no hardship for you."

Typical army-type anti-gay humor. As I said, there was a time when I had my doubts about Curtis, but I don't think so. He's so ho'ny for Vietnam, nothing else.

He was so pleased with himself that all I could do was smile. We spent the rest of the day watching some baseball and then *Hamburger Hill*, not my favorite, but I pretended to enjoy it for Curtis's sake. And why not? The next day I'd be gone, and, at our age, there was a fair chance that by next May 1st, one of us would be dead. My money was on Curtis. If ever there was a candidate for swinging over the drain, it was him. Hell, he told me he thought about it a few years back when he noticed that all the PTSD wackos on TV dramas were from Iraq rather than Nam. I don't think he was kidding.

The Baldknobbers, though. By the name, you'd expect to see nothing more than some hayseed jug band, but it was a sophisticated production with its own theater seating, probably at least a thousand, a gift shop, a big refreshment stand, and a cast of, if not thousands, a couple of dozen serving up huge doses of country music, patriotism, Jesus, and the corniest jokes this side of Minnie Pearl.

It's the sort of thing you can sigh and roll your eyes through, or you can get in the spirit of things and enjoy the hee-haw heck out of it. I couldn't imagine anyone sitting through it more than once, though, but from the frequent, "Watch this!" it was obvious that Curtis was a Baldknobbers vet.

An hour into it, they broke for an intermission. I'd had about enough cornpone by then and suggested we head out for a couple of tall cool ones. "Oh no, the best is yet to come," Curtis said.

In fact, after intermission, I sensed some sort of mood change come over Curtis. He watched the performance with less delight, more distraction, even a slight irritation as if he were waiting for the important thing and anxious to have the preliminaries over with.

And then it came. The theater lights came up. The MC, in cowboy hat, boots, and sequined suit, addressed the audience. The Baldknobber family never let a performance pass by without taking the opportunity to honor our nation's veterans. Then he called on those veterans to stand up and be recognized, branch by branch, army first. Curtis shot up out of his seat, then pulled me

up with him. After our nation's fighting men were honored according to their branch of service, the rhinestone cowboy did it all again, this time calling for us to stand up and be recognized according to the war in which we served, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq I and II. The hell with that. I refused to stand up this time. Curtis reached down for my arm to pull me up, but I yanked it away. So he stood there by himself, at attention—I swear to God, at attention—his face just glowing. Sweet merciful Jesus! This was the highpoint of his miserable life.

We didn't say a word to each other after the show as we waited in the traffic jam to get off the lot. It wasn't until I turned onto 76 that Curtis said, "So. Why wouldn't you stand up back there?"

There were a lot of things I could have said, but the truth is I wasn't entirely sure why I didn't stand up or why I felt so much anger. So I just said, "He meant for combat veterans to stand up, Curtis. Combat. That's you, not me."

This seemed to satisfy Curtis—or at least he didn't say anything. I wasn't ready to go back to the cabin and be alone with him, though, so I stopped at the first watering hole I saw—some lounge connected to a motel—and we went in, ordered beers, and looked around like everything we saw was interesting as all get-out. But really, we just didn't know what to say to each other.

What I did next, I don't know. I guess it was because I was still mad. (Not that I could have said exactly what it was I was mad at). Anyway, I noticed a woman sitting by herself at the bar: a lot of hair, a lot of jewelry, a lot of makeup, looking like she'd been around the block more than once, and on the first trip that the streets weren't paved. I left Curtis at the table and went over to her to turn on the charm, which I can do. They always catch on eventually, but I'm hell on women in the short haul. In about two minutes, I had her by the hand and was leading her over to our table.

"Trixie, this is my pal Curtis. Now I know you had to have seen him staring at you like a love-sick puppy ever since we walked into this place—come on, admit it; you know you did—but he's a little on the shy side, and I figured either I make the introductions or an hour from now Bashful Bob here would still be mooning around over you OK, then! I'll leave you two to get better acquainted."

Trixie sat down next to Curtis, and I went over and stood at the short side of the "L" bar where I could watch.

When I introduced them, Curtis nodded and mouthed something that could have been "Hi," but I didn't hear any sound coming out. I didn't see him saying a thing to her, either. She talked to him, though, and one time, she reached over and kind of ruffled his hair. The only thing I saw him do was hide his bad hand in his lap and fiddle with his beer with the other hand, raising it almost to his lips several times but never quite getting it all the way there as if he'd forgotten how to complete that particular process.

It didn't last long. I hadn't even finished half my beer when Trixie came over to me and said, "You shouldn't have done that to him. You really shouldn't have done that."

"Piss off."

"Bastard."

I walked over to the table but didn't sit down. I stood there, but Curtis wouldn't look up at me. Then I leaned down with my palms flat on the table

and said, “Would it have hurt you to talk to her? Huh? Would it have killed you, Curtis?”

He looked up at me then and said in a quiet, even voice, “You never heard a shot fired in anger. You might as well have been stationed in Iowa.”

“Well, you’re a virgin,” I shot back. “You’ve never had a woman, and you never will.” Then he did something with his face—I think he was trying to smile—but I couldn’t bear to watch.

I went out to my car and got in but didn’t start the engine. I was in no shape to drive just yet. Not from alcohol, though. Hell, I hadn’t finished one beer. But my hands were trembling, I was having trouble controlling my breathing, and I felt sort of dazed. Maybe it was how a soldier feels when he’s just survived a firefight. But then, I wouldn’t know.

I know I’ll never see Curtis again. Trixie had been right: I shouldn’t have done that to him. I wished I could take back what I said to him, too, but you can’t ever take anything back.

That goddamn war. I’m sixty years old, and Curtis damn near it, and out of all those years, we each spent one year in Nam. There was nothing for either of us you’d make a movie about. Curtis lost two fingers and I lost a dink whore. That’s all. Big deal. So why can’t we get past it? It’s like a swamp we walked into and then ... oh, yeah: Halberstam already wrote that book. Curtis has a copy, of course, but it was never one of his favorites.

They don’t have enough names on that black wall in D.C. The least they can do is make room for two more names.



A Wake

by Jason Johnson

There are stones out there
and names of old men etched
on a wrinkled cliff face

—and trees that sing in the fog
in the dark until the sun clears
the horizon of blue mountains—

voices of the sick and the dying
sinking into the muck of riverbanks,
into the frozen forest floor—

voices saying *now*
and *now* and *now*.
Now we can lie down

*in the leaves and let
the earth go.*

The House of the Wounded

by Jason Johnson

The house of wounded
blue light sifts the garden
dirt into the corners of the yard.
Like old trees whose trunks
have wrinkled in the sun,
women stand in the open
doors, brooms in their hands,
and watch the clothes swing
back and forth on the line.
Fences unfurl in long rows
down both sides of a dirt road
more red compacted clay than dirt.

Soon enough, they will carry
coffins into the fields and lay
the dead under the shade
trees where old men used to sit
in cracked gray-slatted
wooden chairs, mason jars
of moonshine in their hands, unfiltered
cigarettes tucked behind their ears.

And when people speak
of this place and dig new
postholes and paint the gray slats
red, the dead will blow white
smoke into the trees
and talk of the dead
they buried, now open
wounds in red clay.

Beatitude (Revision 3)

by Jason Johnson

The snow gathers everywhere
except on sidewalks and parking lots.
Even the cars take on
the shape of a mountain,
the tires now disks of white
light you might find
in a painting of the Nativity.

He tells me his wife is sick,
that soon her legs will turn
blue as the blood moves closer
and closer to the heart.
He lays the hipflask
on the dash and says,

*It snowed every year here
when I was a boy.
I would watch the catfish
nuzzle the skin of blue
ice until, here
and there, fractures formed
a web of broken*

moonlight.

*This was years
Before my father left us
for a woman in the city,
when fields of tobacco lined
both sides of our street,
before the interstate timbered
the woods and turned
the farms to suburbs.*

Near the steps to the house,
a snowman my son built this morning—
its imperfect body a reminder
that the snow is always with us
and that even the broken are blessed.

The Dawn of a New Day

Jacqueline Hainta

Dedicated to the memory of my late husband James W. Hainta

I heard a voice, very faint. I listened, and I could hear my grandmother's voice. She was outside in the very early morning, and I smelled the firewood. My grandpa had already started a fire to warm the house. My grandmother was praying. As I looked out my bedroom window, my breath made a fog on the window. I could not see Grandma clearly, but I heard her soft voice. The winter chill had set in, and the grass was covered with white frost. I listened to Grandma. Her prayers were always long, and her Kiowa language was beautiful. The sun was rising slowly; as it became visible, it made the frost glisten.

My mother was away from home, working. She would come home on the days she did not have to work. I looked forward to seeing her. Her hair was long and very black. Her face was a pretty brown, and her eyes said everything. She was happy all the time, laughing with me and Grandma and Grandpa. My father had died in a car accident, and she was recovering from losing him. I suffered with her, but I don't know if she knew that. Somehow, she must have known; I felt that she knew, especially when she hugged me. She hugged me so tight, like she never wanted to let me go.

I always looked to the east in the morning, wherever I was, because this is the way I remembered Grandma praying; she faced the east, toward the sun. The years had gone by so fast. I was out of high school and wanted to go to the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. I had heard that they had a good vocational school there. I would not be too far from home. My mom had really been an inspiration to me. She encouraged me to go out into the world and be successful.

I had been raised by my grandma and grandpa all these years, and I could not see how I could leave them behind, but I did want to go to this school. I would lie in bed at night and think how it was going to be when I was away from home. What would the three people who I loved so much do when I wasn't here? As it turned out, it was the other way around; I was the one who did not know what to do away from home. I did get to go to Haskell, and I met people from a lot of other tribes there. I was busy, and it was fun at first.

I would awake every morning around 5:00 a.m. I knew that Grandma was outside, at home with her warm, grayish shawl on, and she would be talking in Kiowa to the Creator, thanking Him for the new day. Grandpa would be building the fire to make it warm when Grandma came inside, out of the cold. I missed home.

The Vietnam War was going strong when I was 18 years old. I completed the two-year course at the Haskell Institute and had a degree in letter-press printing. I decided to go to work in Cleveland, Ohio. This is where the World Publishing

Company was located, and I wanted to work there. Two of my colleagues went with me to Ohio and shared living expenses. They, too, were printers. I kept busy and hardly thought of home during the time I was in Ohio. Then, one day, I received a letter from the United States Army. I had been drafted. I was shocked.

I had only a certain amount of time to report to my draft board. I had to say quick goodbyes to friends and people I worked with. My boss assured me that if I wanted my job back after serving my country, it would be waiting on me. I was grateful to him for that.

The loud sound of the train brought my attention back to what was really happening. My life had been interrupted. I thought of home.

The transit workers were going on strike at midnight, and I needed desperately to get the last train to Oklahoma City. I made it, running as fast as I could down the long cement walkway and jumped on the last train as it pulled out. This was an awful lot like *some* movie I'd seen before.

There had been a pow-wow in Oklahoma City the night I arrived on the train. I had to try and make it to Carnegie, my home town. I walked to the bus station and decided to make a couple of telephone calls to relatives, hoping they would be able to give me a lift. If I could get at least partway home, I could walk the rest of the way. As I walked into the bus station and put my bag down, I glanced toward the small cafeteria. It didn't seem to be too crowded at this time of night. I realized that I was hungry. I sat at the counter and ordered coffee. I looked around and caught a glimpse of a hat that looked ever so familiar to me. As I listened, I heard my grandma's voice. They were there! My mom, my grandma, and my grandpa were there. They had gone to the pow-wow and, before going home, had stopped for coffee. I asked myself over and over again, *how did this happen?*

I lay on the front porch that night, looking at the stars. I couldn't sleep. I stared hard at the Big Dipper and the Milky Way. My grandma would tell me stories about the stars. She would say, "Our elders are walking along the Milky Way, and the color is the dust from the buffalo." The story of the Big Dipper was my favorite. The brother had turned into a bear and chased his sisters. An eagle came and told them to jump on the tree stump. The tree stump grew, and the bear clawed at them, but the sisters ascended into the heavens and became the Big Dipper.

I heard an owl in the distance; a cool breeze had begun to blow from the north, and dawn was approaching. I had a vision of my grandma even before she came out for her morning prayer. On this particular morning, she had over her shoulders a beautiful turquoise shawl, adorned with the colors of the rainbow. I had never really looked at Grandma in the way I saw her that morning. She was tall and had blackish-gray hair woven in two braids. Her forehead had wrinkles, and her face was heavy, like something was bothering her. She used her walking cane, which I had never seen her use before. I lay still and listened. I heard the wooden screen door shut; Grandpa had gone out to the woodpile to bring in wood to start the fire. I heard an ax hit the tree stump that he used to split wood. He coughed and groaned a little. He was getting old and tired.

I went to war in Vietnam. It was cold and rainy the morning I left home. It was Indian summer! Grandpa said, "That's when I was born." I thought of him,

I thought of Grandma, and I thought of Mom. The airplane was packed with different nationalities, but somehow, we were all the same for a moment. I wondered if I would ever see home again. The one year I was at war, it seemed like everything was taken from me. I missed a year of my life.

During the war, I remembered one trip I took with my grandma before I left back home. She took me to see one of my grandpas named Henry. He was a medicine man in our Kiowa tribe. He prayed over me that evening and told me about life. He also said, "I might not be here when you come back, but you will come back a strong warrior; nothing will happen to you." The sun was seeping down in the west. It was a color of burnt orange, almost red. It looked hot, like fire. Where was I going?

A year later, I was on an airplane going up, leaving Vietnam and the people who lived there, so much different from where I was going, home! Everyone was singing Christmas carols, but it was springtime in "the world," as we soldiers called it. I turned 21 years old in Vietnam. My grandpa who had prayed over me was true to his word; I was on my way home without being harmed. We would be landing in Oakland, California, soon. It was nighttime. I could not see anything. It was dark. I felt like crying. Was I really back in the world? Would my grandpa and grandma and mom be there to greet me? I wondered how my mom looked. Had they been okay while I was gone? I felt sick.

When I got home, there was a feast of food and laughter. My mom looked beautiful. Her dark hair had become a little gray, but it was becoming attractive. Her teeth were straight and white, and her smile was from ear to ear. She was strikingly beautiful. Had she met someone to be with, I thought? If she had, then I was happy for her. Evening came all too soon. Visitors left, giving one last hug and wishes for a good evening. I sat on the same porch that I had slept on before I left for war. Grandma had become ill and would not be coming out to pray in the morning. Grandpa had suffered a stroke, and some hired hand was there to get the fire going for them. There were so many things to do for my grandparents. I was ever so grateful that I still had them in my life.

I was able to take care of my grandparents in their last few months on earth. I told them stories this time. To see smiles cross their faces was a beautiful sight, and to hear their laughter was emotional to me, because I knew, somehow I knew, they would not be with me too much longer. My grandparents both died a few months after I returned home from the war.

I had been through a cycle of life in such a short time. I found a verse on my grandparents' night stand, and Grandma had written my name on it. I cried silently. I was home, and I was alive. Had they been waiting for me? Had they been waiting for the dawn of a new day? "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

The sage will grow again in the summer months to come. The say-own-gaaw (Indian perfume) will blossom in the heat of the summer; the tobacco will fill our homes with a smell of herbs and earth. The cedar from Longhorn Mountain will be picked by another generation of grandsons for traditional ceremonies. My grandparents will be there, at the top of Longhorn Mountain looking down on us, their life complete on Mother earth. Their legacy will grow within me, for their teachings have shown me the way of what a unique Kiowa man should be.



Hazlitt Unbound

by Matthew Brennan

I waited months in Edinburgh to get
Divorced, but finally freed I fled the city,
Desperate as a man on fire and rushed
To Sarah's arms as if to running water.
I knew her mad for size and feared she shunned
My letters only then to blush barefaced
With other boarders. When I'd left, she kept
My bronze of Bonaparte, which gave me hope.

But when she saw me back, her tears burst forth,
And soon I heard the front door slam. I found
Her five blocks north, her arm around John Tomkins,
And they walked right by, tight-lipped. She had played
The double game with both of us together,
Though no serpent ever kissed so sweet.
Feeling like a man thrown off a roof,
I broke the well-wrought bust into tiny bits,

But can I burn her flaming gaze out of my thoughts?

In Bed at the Churchill Hotel, Ambleside

by Matthew Brennan

Our window reached from the wainscot to the top
Of the west-facing wall. Its view unveiled
Loughrigg Fell looming over us and clouds
That rested on the mountain like a spread.
We'd hiked the trails up to the ridge that rises
Ramp-like and rims a field full of sheep
Weathered as ancient stones; we'd even crossed
A running creek to gain the point of vision
Looking down on the tarn and, lower still,
The Elderwater lake. But now we saw
Just the peak, forgot the rugged rocks,
The mud, the loss of breath: So when you rolled
Over and the robe snowcapping your breasts
Fell open, I rose to a yet greater height.

Saint Brigid's Day

by Matthew Brennan

For Lucy

The day your mother died we woke to snow
General over Indiana. She
Went the way the weather moved. Last week,
We hit the sixties, and green shoots sprang up
Against the white retaining wall. But now
They're gone, under a drift, above which ice
Has sealed the plaster cracks, indelible
As digits denting a stone.



Photo by Amanda Smith

A Fall Retreat on the Beara Peninsula

by Matthew Brennan

Each night, at two, I wake and hear rain rapping
The windows and the roof, as if to clean
My dreams and make me see again. At dawn,
All is fog that shrouds the meadows, homes,
And headlands far away as Coulagh Bay.

Today, by noon, the sun burned off the mist.
At five, I take a sloping road and pass
The houses made of local stones, their hedges
Of fuchsia not yet bloomed—to where the path
Opens to a view of seagulls, boats,
And rolling ocean waves. But it's a vision
For a postcard. I look a while, then wind
My way downhill, eyes earthward, blind and deaf
In the silent dusk that's coming on—until

Within, beneath, beyond the bounding hedges
I hear an inland murmur, water running
Underground, the undersound I had slept through.



Photo courtesy wiolka.de/html/beara_peninsula.html

Contributors

Fred Alsberg is a creative writing instructor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. He has published numerous poems in a variety of journals and magazines, including the *Louisiana Review*, *Oklahoma Today*, the *Greensboro Review*, and *Sundog*; the *Southeast Review*. His chapbook, *Reassembling Dust*, was published in 2007 by Puddinghouse Press, which later published a collection of his themed poems, *Harry the Hack*, in 2012.

Rachel de Baere, a native of the San Francisco area, completed her undergraduate education at U.C. Berkeley. She holds an MPA from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service. She worked for over fifteen years administering New York City programs, serving crime victims and offenders, juvenile and adult. Again living in California, she facilitates writing practice groups and teaches literature courses. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals, including *5 AM*, *G.W. Review*, *Rattlesnake*, and the *Wisconsin Review*.

Matthew Brennan has published four volumes of poems, most recently *The House with the Mansard Roof* (Backwaters Press, 2009), a finalist for the Best Books of Indiana Award. His poems have appeared in *Westview*, *Sewanee Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Commonweal*, and elsewhere. He has also written four books of criticism and has contributed articles and reviews to *The New York Times Book Review*, *Georgia Review*, *South Atlantic Review*, *American Book Review*, *The Simms Review*, and many other publications.

Kevin Collins of Weatherford, OK talks to the trees, but they never listen to him. Who could blame them? He has had comparable experiences with students. Who could blame *them*? On such occasions, he prunes the students and sprinkles fertilizer on the ground where their roots can access it.

Barbara Eknoian received the Jane Buel Bradley Chapbook Award for *Jerkumstances*, her first collection, published by Pearl Editions in 2002. Her work has appeared

previously in *Westview*, and she has also had writings placed in *Pearl*, *Chiron Review*, and "The New Verse News," an online journal. Hailing from New Jersey, she has lived in California since 1978.

Starr Goode has taught semiotics at Otis College of Art and Design and Shakespeare at National University. She serves currently as an adjunct professor of literature at Santa Monica College. Her work has appeared in the *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* and *The Rule of Mars: Readings on the Origins, History and Impact of Patriarchy*. Her prose has been honored with the David L. Kubal Memorial Essay Prize, and she is a recipient of the Henri Coulette Memorial Poetry Award.

Jaqueline Hainta is a full blood Kiowa Native American Indian from Mountain View, OK. She has an Associate degree in American Indian studies and is working on her B.A. in English Literature. She says that writing is a lot like art for her and credits her late husband for her inspiration. Since his passing in January 2012, she sits at her desk and writes what comes to her, hoping to turn her experiences into a novel one day. She also has ten grandchildren from four sons and one daughter. She describes herself as a 62-year-old grandmother with a lot of ambition and a love for writing.

Janet Jennings lives in San Anselmo, CA with her husband and twin daughters. For twenty years, she owned and operated Sunspire, a natural candy manufacturing company. Her work has appeared, or will appear, in *Apalachee Review*, the *Atlanta Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, the *Connecticut Review*, and *Poem*, among others.

Jason Johnson is a teaching associate at Coastal Carolina University specializing in Victorian poetry and prosody. His recent poetic publications include work in *The Yalobusha Review*, and he is among the most authoritative voices on the poetry of William Gilmore Simms. His analyses of Simms's work can be found on *The Simms Initiatives*, a website sponsored by the University of South Carolina.

K. T. Landon is currently studying in the MFA in Writing program in poetry at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Fugue*, *Ibbetson Street*, *The Examined Life*, and *The Sycamore Review*, among other journals. Her essay, "Turf War" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize by *The Journal*. She works as a software engineering manager at a research institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Jim Logan practiced dentistry for twenty-five years in Weatherford. Recently retired, he has re-located to Edmond, OK, a place closer to family. Now that he has time to write, he is happy to do so. A work of his about the Wichita Mountains of southwestern Oklahoma graced the pages of our journal years ago (Winter 1988) in an issue produced under the direction of the late Leroy Thomas, the founding editor of *Westview*.

Cynthia Peña teaches Spanish at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She is also the coordinator of the Spanish Program at SWOSU. Her area of expertise is 20th Century Prose Poem in Spain and Spanish America, and she is also interested in Translation, Golden Age Drama and Baroque Poetry. She is co-author of a Spanish conversation book titled *Hablemos de teatro*.

Matthew Perron attended Northeastern University in Boston. After graduating, he worked at an orphanage for traumatized children, and later he took a job with a computer company. He resides in Brooklyn, where he teaches middle school. His work is slated to appear in *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *The Ledge*, *Sanskrit*, and *G. W. Review*.

Qwen Pinckney holds an executive position at a national company, where she has been employed for thirty years. Her passions in life include writing and traveling.

Lora K. Reiter is a retired professor of English. Her work has been published in various journals, such as *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Cottonwood*, *Sing*, the *Arkansas Quarterly*, and *San Jose State Studies*. Her books include *One Was Annie*, a novel, *Animals Galore and Love Unconditional*, a collection of essays, and *Teaching Fences*, collected poems.

David Scronce is the author of the chapbook "Letters to Liam." David has an MFA from Bennington College. His poems have appeared in *5AM*, *Confrontation*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Rhino*, and elsewhere. David lives in San Francisco and works at U.C. Berkeley. David likes to write poetry because he doesn't sing so well.

Dan Schwarz is the Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow at Cornell University. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and several books. His poetry has appeared in *Ithaca Times*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, and other journals.

A resident of London, England, **Ivor C. Treby** wrote poems that reflect various moods, forms, and lengths. His work has appeared in journals on either side of the Atlantic Ocean, most recently in *Sierra Nevada Review* (USA) and *Assent* (UK). Sadly, the literary world lost a great poet when Treby passed away in 2012.

Dennis Vannatta is a Professor of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He specializes in contemporary fiction and the short story. Vannatta has published over one hundred essays, short stories, and poems, and four scholarly books, on Nathanael West, H. E. Bates, Tennessee Williams, and the contemporary British short story. He has also published three collections of short stories: *This Time*, *This Place*, *Prayers for the Dead*, and *Lives of the Artists*. His short stories have also appeared in many magazines and anthologies, including *Boulevard*, *Antioch Review*, and *Pushcart XV*.

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